

THE EARTHLY PARADISE  
IN TWELVE PARTS



THE EARTHLY  
PARADISE: A POEM  
BY WILLIAM MORRIS

PART IX

THE STORY OF RHODOPE  
THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

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## NOVEMBER

ARE thine eyes weary? is thy heart too sick  
To struggle any more with doubt and thought,  
Whose formless veil draws darkening now and thick  
Across thee, e'en as smoke-tinged mist-wreaths brought  
Down a fair dale to make it blind and nought?  
Art thou so weary that no world there seems  
Beyond these four walls, hung with pain and dreams?

Look out upon the real world, where the moon,  
Half-way 'twixt root and crown of these high trees,  
Turns the dead midnight into dreamy noon,  
Silent and full of wonders, for the breeze  
Died at the sunset, and no images,  
No hopes of day, are left in sky or earth—  
Is it not fair, and of most wondrous worth?

Yea, I have looked and seen November there;  
The changeless seal of change it seemed to be,  
Fair death of things that, living once, were fair;  
Bright sign of loneliness too great for me,  
Strange image of the dread eternity,  
In whose void patience how can these have part,  
These outstretched feverish hands, this restless heart?

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ON a clear eve, when the November sky  
Grew red with promise of the hoar-frost nigh,  
These ancient men turned from the outside cold,  
With something like content that they, grown old,  
Needed but little now to help the ease  
Of those last days before the final peace.  
The empty month for them left no regret  
For sweet things gained and lost, and longed for yet,  
'Twixt spring-tide and this dying of the year.  
Few things of small account the whole did bear,  
Nor like a long lifetime of misery  
Those few days seemed, as oft to such may be  
As, seeing the patience of the world, whereby  
Midst all its strife it falls not utterly  
Into a wild, confused mass of pain,  
Yet note it not, and have no will to gain,  
Since they are young, a little time of rest,  
Midst their vain raging for the hopeless best.

Such thought, perchance, was in his heart, who broke  
The silence of the fireside now, and spoke ;  
" This eve my tale tells of a fair maid born  
Within a peaceful land, that peace to scorn,  
In turn to scorn the deeds of mighty kings,  
The counsel of the wise, and far-famed things,  
And envied lives ; so, born for discontent,

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She through the eager world of base-folk went,  
Still gaining nought but heavier weariness.  
God grant that somewhere now content may bless  
Her yearning heart; that she may look and smile  
On the strange earth that wearied her awhile,  
And now forgets her! Yet so do not we,  
Though some of us have lived full happily!"

# THE STORY OF RHODOPE

## ARGUMENT

THERE was in a poor land a certain maid, lowly but exceeding beautiful, who, by a strange hap, was drawn from her low estate, and became a queen and the world's wonder.

A GRECIAN-SPEAKING folk there dwelt of yore,  
Whose name my tale remembers not, between  
The snow-topped mountains and the sea-beat shore,  
Upon a strip of plain, and upland green,  
Where seldom was the worst of summer seen,  
And seldom the last bond of winter's cold ;  
Easy was life 'twixt garden, field, and fold.

My tale says these dealt little with the sea,  
But for the mullet's flushed vermilion,  
And weight o' the tunny, and what things might be  
Behind the snowy tops but moon and sun  
They knew not, nor as yet had any one  
Sunk shaft in hill-side there, or dried the stream  
To see if 'neath its sand gold specks might gleam.

Yet rich enow they were ; deep-uddered kine  
Went lowing towards the pails at eventide ;  
The sheep cropped close unto the well-fenced vine,  
Whose clusters hung upon the southering side  
Of the fair hill ; the brown plain far and wide

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

Changed year by year through green to hoary gold,  
And the unherded, moaning bees untold,

Blind-eyed to aught but blossoms, ranged the land,  
Working for others; and the clacking loom  
Not long within the homestead still did stand;  
The spindles twirled within the women's room,  
And oft amidst the depth of winter's gloom,  
From off the poplar-block white chips would fly  
'Neath some deft hand, watched of the standers-by.

Sometimes too would the foreign chapmen come,  
And beach their dromond in the sandy bay,  
And then the women-folk from many a home,  
With heavy-laden beasts would take their way,  
And round the black-keeled ship expend the day,  
And by the moon would come back, light enow,  
With things soon told for that rough wealth to show.

Therefore of delicate array, full oft  
Small lack there was in coffers of that land,  
And gold would shine on shoulders smooth and soft,  
And sparklike gems glitter from many a hand,  
And by the altar would the goodman stand  
Upon the solemn days of sacrifice,  
Clad in attire of no such wretched price.

But the next morn the yellow-headed girls  
Would be afield, or 'twixt the vine-rows green,  
And on the goodman's forehead would no pearls,  
But rather sun-drawn beaded drops be seen,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

As the bright share carved out the furrow clean,  
Or the thick swath fell 'neath the sturdy stroke :  
For all must labour midst that simple folk.

Now, in a land where few were poor, if none  
Were lordly rich, a certain man abode,  
Who poorer was perchance than any one  
That ruled a house ; yea, somewhat of a load  
Of fears he bare adown life's latter road,  
For, touching now upon his sixtieth year,  
His wealth still waned, and still his house grew bare

Why this should be none knew, for he was deft  
In all the simple craft of that fair land,  
Plough-stilt, and spade, and sickle, and axe-heft,  
As much as need be pressed his hardened hand,  
And creeping wanhope still did he withstand ;  
Wedded he was, and his grey helpmate too  
Was skilled in all, and ever wrought her due.

Yet did his goods decrease : at end of dry  
He cut his hay, to lie long in the rain ;  
And timorous must he let the time go by  
For vintaging ; and August came in vain  
To his thin wheat ; his sheep of wolves were slain ;  
Lame went his horses, barren were his kine,  
His slaughtering-stock before the knife would pine.

All this befell him more than most I say,  
And yet he lived on ; gifts were plenty there,  
The rich man's wealth but seldom hoarded lay ;

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And at a close-fist would the people stare,  
And point the finger as at something rare—  
Yet ever giving is a burden still,  
And fast our goodman trundled down the hill.

Not always though had fortune served him thus,  
In earlier days rich had he been and great,  
But had no chick or child to bless his house,  
And much did it mislike him of his fate,  
And early to the Gods he prayed and late,  
To give him that if all they took besides,  
As to fate's feet will blind men still be guides.

So on a day when more than twenty years  
Of childless wedlock had oppressed his wife,  
She spake to him with smiles and happy tears ;  
And said, " Be glad, for ended is the strife  
Betwixt us and the Gods, and our old life  
Shall be renewed to us ; the blossom clings  
Unto the bough long barren, the waste sings."

Joyful he was at those glad words, and went  
A changed man through his homestead on that morn,  
And on fair things stored up he stared intent,  
And hugged himself on things he erst did scorn,  
When life seemed quickly ended and forlorn.  
And so the days passed, till the time was come  
When a new voice should wail on its cold home.

March was it, but a foretaste of the June  
The earth had, and the budding linden-grove

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

About the homestead, with the brown bird's tune  
Was happy, and the faint blue sky above  
The black-thorn blossoms made meet roof for love,  
For though the south wind breathed a thought of rain,  
No cloud as yet its golden breadth did stain.

That afternoon within his well-hung hall,  
Amidst of many thoughts the goodman lay  
Until a gentle sleep on him 'gan fall,  
And he began to dream, but the sweet day  
The dream forgot not, nor could wipe away  
The pictures of his home that seemed so good,  
For midst his garden in his dream he stood ;

Hand in hand with his wife he seemed to be,  
And both their eyes were lovingly intent  
Upon a little blossom fair to see  
Before their feet, that through the fresh air sent  
Sweet odours ; but as over it they bent,  
The day seemed changed to cloudiness and rain,  
And the sweet flower, whereof they were so fain,

Was grown a goodly sapling, and they gazed  
Wondering thereat, but loved it nothing less.  
But as they looked a bright flame round it blazed,  
And hid it for a space, and weariness  
The souls of both the good folk did oppress,  
And on the earth they lay down side by side,  
And unto them it was as they had died.



## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

Yet did they know that o'er them hung the tree  
Grown mighty, thick-leaved, on each bough did hang  
Crown, sword, or ship, or temple fair to see ;  
And therewithal a great wind through it sang,  
And trumpet blast there was ; and armour rang  
Amid that leafy world, and now and then  
Strange songs were sung in tongues of outland men.

Amid these sounds the goodman heard at last  
A song in his own tongue, and sat upright  
And blinking at the broad bright sun that cast  
A straight beam through the window, making bright  
The dusky hangings ; till his gathering sight  
Showed him outside two damsels, pail on head,  
Who went by, singing, to the milking-shed.

And meeting them with jingling bit and trace  
Came the grey team from field ; a merry lad  
Sat sideways on the foremost, broad of face,  
Freckled and flaxen-haired, whose red lips had  
A primrose 'twixt them, yet still blithe and glad,  
With muffled whistle, swinging, did he mock  
The maidens' song and the brown throstle-cock.

Then rose the goodman, happy, for his dream  
Seemed nowise ill to think on ; rather he  
Some echo of his hopes the thing did deem  
If hardly any certain prophecy  
Of happy things in time to come to be ;  
And into the March sun he wandered forth,  
With life and wealth all grown of double worth.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

From barn to well-stocked field he went that eve,  
Smiling on all, and wondering how it was  
That any one in such a world might grieve,  
At least for long, at what might come to pass ;  
The soft south-wind, the flowers amid the grass,  
The fragrant earth, the sweet sounds everywhere,  
Seemed gifts too great almost for man to bear.

Long wandered he, the happiest of all men  
Till day was gone, and the white moon and high  
Cast a long shadow on the white stones, when  
He came once more his homestead door anigh ;  
And there a girl stood watching, and a cry  
Burst from her lips when she beheld him come ;  
She said, " O welcome to thy twice-blessed home !

" Thy wife hath borne to thee a maiden fair,  
Come and behold it, and give thanks withal  
Unto the Gods, who thus have heard thy prayer."  
Sweetly that voice upon his ears did fall,  
'Twixt him and utter bliss no bounding wall  
Seemed raised now, nor did end of life seem nigh ;  
Once more he had forgot that he must die.

So on the morrow high feast did he hold,  
And all the guests with gifts were satisfied,  
And gladdened were the Gods of field and fold,  
With many a beast that at their altars died.  
How should the spring of all that wealth be dried ?  
Nought did he deal with untried things or strange,  
'Twixt year and year how might the seasons change ?

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Well, by next year, grown had the child and thriven  
Unto his heart's desire, and in his hall  
Again was high feast held, and good gifts given  
To the departing guests ; yet did it fall  
That somewhat his goods minished therewithal,  
But little grief it gave him ; " Ah, let be ;  
This year will raise the scale once more," said he.

But as the time passed, with the child's increase  
Did ill luck grow apace, till field by field  
Fell his lands from him ; nought he knew of ease,  
Yet little good-hap did his trouble yield ;  
The Gods belike a new bag had unsealed  
Of hopeless longing for him, and his day  
Mid restless yearning still must pass away.

SO things went on, till June of that same year  
Whereof I tell, when nineteen May-tides green  
The maid had looked on, and was grown so fair  
That never yet the like of her had been  
Within that land ; and her divine soft mien,  
Her eyes and her soft speech, now blessed alone  
A house wherefrom all fair things else were gone.

Yet whoso gloomed thereat, not she it was  
Who with her grave set face and heart unmoved,  
Watched, wearied not nor pleased, each new day pass ;  
Nor thought of change, she said. As well behaved,

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By many men ere now was she beloved ;  
Wild words she oft had heard, and harder grown  
At bitter tears about her fair feet strown.

For far apart from these she seemed to be,  
Their joys and sorrows moved her not, and they  
Looked upon her as some divinity,  
And cursed her not, though whiles she seemed to lay  
A curse on them unwitting, and the day  
Seemed grown unhappy, useless, as she came  
With eyes fulfilled of thoughts of life and shame

Across their simple merriment. Meanwhile  
She laboured as need was, nor heeded aught  
What thing she did, nor yet did aught seem vile  
More than another that the long day brought  
Unto her hands ; and as her father fought  
Against his bitter foe, she watched it all  
As though in some strange play the thing did fall.

And he, who loved her yet amidst of fear,  
Would look upon her, wondering, even as though  
He, daring not her soul to draw anear,  
Yet of her hopes and fears was fain to know,  
Was fain to hope that she one day would show  
In what wise he within her heart was borne ;  
Yea, if that day he found in her but scorn.

It fell then in the June-tide, mid these things,  
That on an eve within the bare great hall,  
When nigh the window the bat's flickering wings

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

Were brushing, and the soft dew fast did fall,  
And o'er the ferry far away did call  
The homeward-hastening traveller, that the three  
Sat resting in that soft obscurity.

Some tale belike unto the other two  
The goodman had been telling, for he said,  
“ Well, in the end no more the thieves might do,  
For when enough of them were hurt or dead  
Needs must they cry for quarter ; by Jove's head,  
That parley as sweet music did I hear,  
Who for three hours had seen grim death anear.

“ So then their tall ship did we take in tow,  
And beached her in the bay with no small pain.  
The painted dragon-head, that ye note now  
Grin at Jove's temple-door with gapings vain,  
And her steel beaks the merchant-galleys' bane,  
We smote away ; with every second oar  
We roofed that house of refuge nigh the shore.

“ Then fell we unto ransacking her hold,  
And left them store of meal, but took away  
Armour, fair cloths, and silver things and gold,  
Rich raiment, wine and honey ; then we lay  
Upon the beach that latter end of day,  
And shared the spoil by drawing short and long—  
That was before my fate 'gan do me wrong,

“ And good things gat I ; two such casks of wine,  
And such a jar of honey, as would make

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The very Gods smile, had they come to dine  
E'en in this bare hall; ah! my heart doth ache,  
Rhodope, O my daughter! for thy sake,  
When of the gold-sewn purple robe I tell  
That certes now had matched thy beauty well.

“What else? a crested helm all golden wrought,  
A bow and sheaf of arrows—there they hang  
Since they with one thing else came not to nought  
Of all the things o'er which the goodwife sang,  
When on the threshold first my spear-butt rang,  
And o'er the bay the terror of the sea  
With clipped wings laboured slow and painfully.

“Take down the bow, goodwife; a thing of price  
Though unadorned, therefore it yet bides here;  
For trusty is it in the wood, and wise;  
The long shafts are to find the dappled deer  
And mend our four days' fast with better cheer.  
But for the other thing—the twilight fails  
Amid these half-remembered woeful tales;

“So light the taper for a little while  
To see a marvel.” Therewith speedily  
The goodwife turned, the candle showed her smile,  
And eyes upon Rhodope fixed, that she  
Perchance in her some eagerness might see;  
But on the brightening stars her wide eyes stared  
E'en when the taper through the darkness glared.

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

Then to the great chest did the goodman go,  
And turning o'er the coarser household gear  
That lay therein, much stuff aside did throw  
Ere from the lowest depths his hand did bear  
A silken cloth of red, embroidered fair,  
Wrapped about something ; this upon the board  
He laid, and 'gan unfold the precious hoard.

With languid eyes that hoped for little joy,  
Rhodope, as she turned, gazed down thereon,  
Waiting the showing forth of that fair toy,  
In days long past from fear and battle won ;  
But yet a strange light in her bright eyes shone  
When now the goodman did the cloth unfold,  
And showed the gleam of precious gems and gold.

And there upon the silken cloth now lay  
Twin shoes first made for some fair woman's feet,  
Wrought like the meadows of an April day,  
With gems amidst the sun of gold ; most meet  
To show in kings' halls, when the music sweet  
Is at its softest, and the dance grown slow,  
Midst of white folds the feet of maids may show.

Now by these fair things did Rhodope stand,  
And, blushing faintly, 'gan the latchets touch,  
And daintily across them drew her hand,  
Then let it fall, smiling, that overmuch  
She thought of them, then turned away to such  
Rude work as then the season asked of her,  
With face firm set that weary life to bear.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then said the goodman, with a rueful smile  
Turned on her, "Chick or child I had not then,  
But riches, wherewith fortune did beguile  
My heart to ask for more; and now again  
That thou grow'st fairer than the seed of men,  
All goes from me—and let these go withal,  
Since I am thrust so rudely to the wall!

"Long have I kept them; first, for this indeed,  
That few men of our land have will therefor  
To pay me duly; and the coming need  
Still did I fear would make the past less sore;  
And then withal a man well skilled in lore  
Grew dreamy o'er them once, and said that they  
Bore with them promise of a changing day.

"Yet bread is life, and while we live we yet  
May turn a corner of this barren lane,  
And Jove's high-priest hath ever prayed to get  
These fair things, and prayed hitherto in vain:  
Belike a yoke of oxen might I gain  
To turn the home-field deeper, when the corn,  
Such as it is, to barn and stack is borne.

"The meal-ark groweth empty too, and thou,  
O fairest daughter, worthy to be clad  
In weed like this, shalt feel November blow  
No blessing to thee; cask-staves must be had  
Against the vintage, seeing that men wax glad  
Already o'er the bunches, and the year  
Folk deem great wealth to all men's sons will bear.



## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

“So, daughter, unto thee this charge I give  
To take these things to-morrow morn with thee  
Unto Jove’s priest, and say, we needs must live ;  
Therefore these fair shoes do I let him see,  
That he may say what he will give to me,  
That they may shine upon his daughter’s feet,  
When she goes forth the sacrifice to meet.”

Now as he spake again a light flush came  
Into her cheek, and died away again ;  
Then cried the goodwife ; “ Ah, thou bearest shame,  
That we are fallen ’neath the feet of men,  
That thou goest like a slave ! what didst thou then  
So coldly e’en on this man’s son to look,  
That he thy scornful eyes no more might brook ? ”

Still sat Rhodope, e’en as though of stone  
Her face was, and the goodman spake and said ;  
“ Nay, mother, nay, she is not such an one  
As lightly to our highest to be wed  
Before the crown of love has touched her head :  
Be patient ; hast thou ne’er heard stories tell  
What things to such as her of old befell ? ”

Kindly he smiled at her, as half he meant  
The words he said ; but now her changeless eye  
Cast on him one hard glance, and then she bent  
Over her work, and with a half-choked sigh  
The goodman rose, and from a corner nigh  
Took up some willow-withes, and so began  
To shape the handle of a winnowing fan.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

**B**UT with the new day's sun might you behold  
The maiden's feet firm planted on the way  
Which led unto the vale, where field and fold  
About the temple of the Thunderer lay,  
And the priest wrought, a sturdy carle to-day,  
Within the hay-field or behind the plough,  
To-morrow dealing with high things enow.

First betwixt sunny meads the highway ran  
With homesteads set therein, and vineyards green,  
Now merry with the voice of maid and man,  
Who shouted greetings the tall rows between,  
Whereto she answered softly, as a queen  
Who feels herself of other make to be  
Than those who worship her divinity.

The dark-eyed shepherd slowly by her passed,  
And from his face faded the merry smile,  
And down upon the road his eyes he cast,  
And strove with other names his heart to wile  
From thought of her ; so coarse he seemed and vile  
Before her smileless face, o'er which there shone  
Some glory, as of a bright secret sun,

That was for her alone. The mother stood  
Within her door, and as the gown of grey  
Fluttered about her, and the coarse white hood

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

Flashed from the oak-shade o'er the sunlit way,  
She muttered after her ; " Ah, have thy day,  
If thou wert set high up as thou art low,  
On many a neck those feet of thine should go ! "

But heeding little of the hearts of these  
She went upon her way, and walking fast  
Soon left the tilled fields and the cottages,  
For toward the mountain-slopes the highway passed,  
And turned unto the south, and 'gan at last  
To mount aloft 'twixt heathery slopes set o'er  
With red-trunked pines, and mossy rocks and hoar.

Still fast she went, though high the sun was grown,  
For on strange thoughts and wild her heart was set ;  
Those things held in the bosom of her gown  
Seemed teaching hopes she might not soon forget ;  
She clenched her hands harder and harder yet,  
And cried aloud ; " So small, so quickly done,  
O idle, timorous life beneath the sun !

" And here amid these fields and mountains grey,  
Drop after drop slowly it ebbs from me,  
And leaves no new thing gained ; day like to day,  
Face like to face, as waves in some calm sea !  
With memory of our sad mortality  
Pipes the dull tune of earth, nought comes anigh  
To give us some bright dream before we die.

" What say'st thou—' Beautiful thou art and livest,  
And men there are, strong, young and fair enow,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

To take with thankful heart e'en what thou givest ;  
Love and be loved then ! '—Nay, heart, dost thou know  
How through thin flame of love thou still wilt show  
The long years set with mocking images,  
Ready to trap me if I think of these ?

“ Ah, love they say, and love ! Shall not love fade  
And turn a prison, barred with vain regret  
And vain remorse that we so lightly weighed  
The woes wherein our stumbling feet were set,  
Stifling with thoughts we never may forget ;  
Because life waneth, while we strive to turn  
And seek another thing for which to yearn ?

“ So deem I of the life that holds me here,  
As though I were the shade of one long dead,  
Come back a while from Pluto's region drear  
To mine own land where unremembered  
My fathers are—Lo, now, these words just said,  
This heathery slope my feet are passing o'er,  
Yon grey-winged dove—has it not been before ?

“ Would then that I were gone, and lived again  
Another life ;—if it must still be so,  
That life on life passes, forgotten, vain  
To still our longings, that no soul can know  
By what has been how this and this shall go—  
Because methinks I yet have heard men tell  
How lives there were wherein great things befell.

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“How mid such life had I forgot the past,  
Nor thought about the future! but been glad  
While round my head a dreamy veil I cast,  
And seemed to strive with seeming good or bad;  
Till at the last some dream I might have had  
That nigh a god I was become to be,  
And, dying, yet should keep all memory;

“Know what I was, nor change my hope and fear  
All utterly, but learn why I was born,  
Nor come to loathe what once to me was dear,  
Nor dwell amidst a world of ghosts forlorn,  
Nor see kind eyes, and hear kind words, with scorn  
—But ye, O fields, and hills, and steads of men,  
Why are ye fair to mock my longings then?”

And therewithal panting she turned, and stood  
High up the hillside; a light fitful wind  
Sung mournful ditties through the pine-tree wood  
That edged the borders of the pass behind,  
And made most fitting music to her mind,  
But clear and hot the day of June did grow,  
And a fair picture spread out down below.

The green hill-slopes, besprinkled o'er with kine,  
And a grey neat-herd wandering here and there,  
And then the greener squares of well-propped vine,  
The changing cornfields, and the homesteads fair,  
The white road winding on, that yet did bear  
Specks as of men and horses; the grey sea  
Meeting the dim horizon dreamily.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

A little while she gazed, then, with a sigh,  
She turned again, and went on toward the pass,  
But slowly now, and somewhat wearily,  
And murmuring as she met the coarser grass  
Within the shade : " What, something moved I was,  
By hope, and pity of myself ! Well then,  
I shall not have that joy so oft again."

Then with bent head, 'twixt rocky wall and wall,  
Slowly she went, and scarce knew what she thought,  
So many a picture on her heart did fall,  
Nor would she let one wish to her be brought  
Of good or better. Going so, distraught,  
The long rough road was nothing to her feet,  
Nor took she heed of what her eyes might meet.

But so far through the pass at last she came,  
That the road fell unto the temple-vale,  
And there she stopped and started, for her name  
She heard called out. She thought of many a tale  
Of gods who brought to mortals joy or bale,  
For so, despite herself, her thoughts would run,  
That all the joy of life was not yet done.

But from the hillside came a dappled hound  
That fawned upon her e'en as one he knew,  
And when she raised her eyes, and looked around,  
She saw the man indeed he 'longed unto,  
A huntsman armed, and clad in gown of blue,  
Come clattering down the stones of the pass-side ;  
So, standing still, his coming did she bide.

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She smiled a smile that was not all of bliss,  
For this was he of whom her mother spake,  
The high-priest's son, who fain had made her his;  
And at the sight of him her heart did ache  
With hapless thoughts, and scorn and shame 'gan wake  
Within her mind, that still she strove to lull,  
Calling herself both cursed and beautiful.

So, while she gathered heart of grace to meet  
The few words they might speak together there,  
He was beside her; slim he was and fleet,  
Well knit, with dark-brown eyes and crisp black hair,  
Eager of aspect, round-chinned, fresh, and fair,  
And well attired as for that simple folk  
Who in those days might bear no great man's yoke.

Now his lip trembled, and he blushed blood-red,  
Then paled again. "Rhodope! fair to see,  
Thou go'st afoot this merry morn," he said;  
"Hast thou some errand with my sire or me?"  
And therewithal, as if unwittingly,  
Unto her hand did he stretch out his hand;  
But moveless as an image did she stand,

But that her gown was fluttering in the wind  
That came up from the pass. She spake as one  
That hath no care at heart: "I thought to find  
Thy father, and to give to him alone  
A message from my father. Is he gone?"  
He seemed to swallow something in his throat:  
"These two nights, maiden, hath he been afloat,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"Watching the tunnies; if thou turn'st again  
Thou well mayst meet him coming from the sea."  
"Nay," said she, "neither wholly shall be vain  
My coming so far, since I have with me  
Poor offerings meet for the divinity  
From poor folk, which my mother bade me bear  
To bless this midmost month of the glad year."

"In a good hour," he said, "for I have done  
Little against the roes whereof to tell,  
So I will fare with thee; and till the sun  
Is getting low, in our house shalt thou dwell,  
And in the evening, if it like thee well,  
With helmet on the head, and well-strung bow,  
Beside thee to thine own home will I go."

Nought spake she for a while, and his heart beat  
Quicker with hope of some small happiness;  
But at the last her eyes his eyes did meet.  
She spake: "Few hearts this heart of mine will bless,  
And yet for thee will I do nothing less  
Than save thee from the anguish of the strife  
Wherewith thou fain wouldst make my life thy life.

"Thou art unhappy now, but we may part,  
And to us both is left long lapse of time  
To gain new bliss. What wouldst thou? To my heart  
Cold now and alien are this folk and clime,  
And while I dwell with them no woe or crime,  
If so I may, shall stain my garments' hem;  
Thou art an image like the rest of them;



## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

“Yea, but an image unto me alone,  
For unto thee this world is wide enow,  
Full of warm hearts enow—so get thee gone  
Upon thy way. I am not fallen so low  
As unto thee dreams of false love to show,  
Or for my very heart’s own weariness  
To give thee clinging life-long sharp distress.

“Now fain I would unto the temple-stead ;  
And, if thou mayst, do thou go otherwhere,  
For good it were that all thy hopes were dead,  
Since nought but bitter fruit they now can bear.”  
He gazed at her as one who doth not hear,  
Or hears an outland tongue ill understood ;  
Wild love and hate made wild-fire of his blood.

Yea, she belike was nigher unto death  
Than she might know ; yet did he turn at last  
And, clutching tight his short-sword’s gold-wrought  
sheath,  
Slowly along the seaward way he passed,  
Nor backward at her any look he cast,  
For fate would not that his blind eyes should see  
How on the way her tears fell plenteously.

Yet not long there she stayed, but set her face  
Unto the downward road, but had not fared  
A many yards from that their meeting-place,  
Before upon the wind a sound she heard,  
As though some poor wretch a great sorrow bared  
Unto the eyes of heaven, and then her feet  
With quicker steps the stony way did meet.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And soon she said : " O fate, all left behind,  
I follow thee adown the bitter road  
With weary feet, and heavy eyes and blind,  
That leadeth to thy far unknown abode ;  
No need, then, with thy stings my flesh to goad,  
Keep them for those that strive with thee in vain,  
And leave me to my constant weary pain."

Now the pass, widening, to her eyes did show  
The little vale hemmed in by hills around,  
Wherein was Jove's house fair and great enow,  
Some three miles thence, but on a rising ground,  
And with fair fields as a green girdle bound,  
And guarded well by long low houses white,  
Orchards for fruit, and gardens for delight.

Far off, like little spots of white, she saw  
The long-winged circling pigeons glittering  
Above the roofs, the noise of rook and daw  
Came sweet upon the wind from the dark ring  
Of elms that edged the cornfields ; with wide wing  
The fork-tailed restless kite sailed over her,  
Hushing the twitter of the linnets near.

She stayed now, gazing downward ; at her feet  
A dark wood clad the hollow of the hill,  
And its black shade a little lake did meet,  
Whose waters smooth a babbling stream did still,  
Then toward the temple-stead stretched on, until  
Green meads with oaks beset 'gan hem it in,  
And from its nether end the stream did win

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

She gazed and saw not, heard and did not hear,  
But said : "Once more have I been vehement,  
Have spoken out, as if I knew from where  
Come good and ill, and whither they are sent,  
As though I knew whereon I was intent ;  
So, knowing that I know not, e'en as these  
Who think themselves as gods and goddesses

"To know both good and evil must I do.  
Now ne'er again in this wise shall it be  
While here I dwell, nor shall false hope shine through  
My prison bars, false passion jeer at me  
With what might hap if I were changed and free ;  
The end shall come at last, and find me here,  
Desiring nought, and free from hope or fear."

So saying, but with face cleared not at all,  
Rather with trembling lips, upon her way  
Once more she went ; short now did shadows fall,  
It grew unto the hottest of the day,  
And round the mountain-tops the sky waxed grey,  
For very heat ; June's sceptre o'er the earth,  
If rest it gave, kept back some little mirth.

At last upon the bridge the stream that crossed  
Just ere it met the lake she set her feet,  
And walked on swiftly, e'en as one clean lost  
In thought, till at its end her skirt did meet  
A bough of briar-rose, whose blossoms sweet  
Were draggled in the dust ; she stooped thereto  
And from her hem its hooked green thorns she drew.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then heaving a deep breath, she cast aside  
The broken bough ; and from the dusty road  
She turned, and o'er the parapet she eyed  
The broad blue lake, the basking pike's abode,  
And the dark oakwood where the pigeons cooed ;  
And as she gazed, some little touch of bliss  
Came over her amidst her loneliness.

Drowsy she felt, and weary with the way,  
And mid such listlessness that brought no pain,  
She drew her arms from off the coping grey,  
And o'er the bridge went slowly back again,  
As though no whit of purpose did remain  
Within her mind ; but when the other end  
She passed, along the stream she 'gan to wend.

She watched its eddies till it widened out  
Into the breezy lake, and even there  
Began the wood ; so then she turned about,  
And shading her grave eyes with fingers fair,  
Beneath the sun beheld the temple glare  
O'er the far tree-tops ; then she cast her down  
Within the shade on last year's oak-leaves brown.

There as she lay, at last her fingers stole  
Unto the things that on her bosom lay,  
She drew them forth and slowly 'gan unroll  
The silken cloth, until a wandering ray  
Upon the shoe's bright 'broideries 'gan to play  
Through the thick leaves ; and with a flickering smile  
She 'gan her mind with stories to beguile.

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

Pondering for whom those dainty things were  
wrought,  
And in what land ; and in what wondrous wise  
She missed the gift of them ; and what things brought  
The sea-thieves to her land—until her eyes  
Fell on her own gear wrought in homely guise,  
And with a half smile she let fall the gold  
And glistening gems her listless hand did hold.

Then long she lay there, gazing at the sky  
Between the thick leaves, growing drowsier,  
While slowly the grey rabbit hobbled by,  
And the slim squirrel twisted over her  
As one to heed not ; as if none were near  
The woodpecker slipped up the smooth-barked tree,  
The water-hen clucked nigh her fearlessly.

But in a little while she woke, and still  
Felt as if dreaming, all seemed far away  
Save present rest, both hope and fear and ill ;  
The sun was past the middle of the day,  
But bathed in flood of light the world still lay,  
And all was quiet, but for faint sounds made  
By the wood-creatures wild and unafraid.

From out her wallet now coarse food she drew,  
And ate with dainty mouth, then o'er the strip  
Of dazzling sunlight where the daisies grew  
Unto the babbling streamlet's rushy lip  
She went, and kneeling down thereby did dip  
Her hollow hand into the water grey  
And drank, then back again she went her way.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

There 'neath the tree-bole lay the glittering shoes,  
And over them she stood awhile and gazed,  
Then stooped adown as though one might not choose ;  
And from the grass one by the latchet raised,  
And with the eyes of one by slumber dazed  
Did off her own foot-gear, and one by one  
Set the bright things her shapely feet upon.

Then to the thick wood slowly did she turn,  
And through its cool shade wandered till once more  
Thinner it grew, and spots of light did burn  
Upon her jewelled feet, till lay before  
Her upraised eyes a bay with sandy shore ;  
And 'twixt the waves and birds' abiding-place  
Was stretched a treeless, sunlit, grassy space.

Friendly the sun, the bright flowers, and the grass  
Seemed after the dark wood ; with upraised gown  
Slowly unto the water did she pass,  
And on the grassy edge she sat her down ;  
And since right swift these latter hours had flown  
Less did the sun burn ; there awhile she lay  
Watching a little breeze sweep up the bay.

Shallow it was, a shore of hard white sand  
Met the green herbage, and as clear as glass  
The water ran in ripples o'er that strand,  
Until it well-nigh touched the flowery grass ;  
A dainty bath for weary limbs it was,  
And so the maiden thought belike, for she  
'Gan put her raiment from her languidly.

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

Until at last from out her poor array,  
Pure did she rise e'en as that other One  
Rose up from out the ragged billows grey,  
For earth's dull days and heavy to atone ;  
How like another sun her gold hair shone ;  
In the green place, as down she knelt, and raised  
The glittering shoes, and long time on them gazed,

As on strange guides that thus had brought her there,  
Then cast them by, so that apart they fell,  
And in the sunlight glittering lay and fair,  
Like the elves' blossoms, hard and lacking smell ;  
Then to the sward she stooped, and bud and bell  
Of the June's children gat into her hand,  
And left the grass for the scarce-covered sand.

She stood to watch the thin waves mount her feet  
Before she tried the deep, then toward the wide,  
Sun-litten space she turned, and 'gan to meet  
The freshness of the water cool, and sighed  
For pleasure as the little rippling tide  
Lapped her about, and slow she wandered on  
Till many a foot from shore she now had won.

There, as she played, she heard a bird's harsh cry,  
And looking to the steep hill-side could see  
A broad-winged eagle hovering anigh,  
And stood to watch his sweeping flight and free  
Dark 'gainst the sky, then turned round leisurely  
Unto the bank, and saw a bright red ray  
Shoot from a great gem on the sea-thieves' prey.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then slowly through the water did she move,  
Down on the changing ripple gazing still,  
As loth to leave it, and once more above  
Her golden head rang out the erne's note shrill,  
Grown nigher now ; she turned unto the hill,  
And saw him not, and once again her eyes  
Fell on the strange shoes' jewelled 'broideries.

And even therewithal a noise of wings  
Flapping, and close at hand again the cry,  
And then the glitter of those dainty things  
Was gone, as a great mass fell suddenly,  
And rose again, ere Rhodope could try  
To raise her voice, for now might she behold  
Within his claws the gleam of gems and gold.

Awhile she gazed at him as, circling wide,  
He soared aloft, and for a space could see  
The gold shoe glitter, till the rock-crowned side  
Of the great mountain hid him presently,  
And she 'gan laugh that such a thing should be  
So wrought of fate, for little did she fear  
The lack of their poor wealth, or pinching cheer.

But when she was aland again and clad,  
And turned back through the wood, a sudden thought  
Shot through her heart, and made her somewhat glad ;  
"Small things," she said, "my feet have thither brought:  
Perchance this strange hap shall not be for nought."  
And therewithal stories she 'gan to tell  
Unto her heart how such things once befell,



## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

How as it had been it might be again.  
Then from her fragrant breast she took the shoe  
Yet left, and turned it o'er and o'er in vain,  
If yet she might therein find aught of new  
To tell her what all meant ; and thus she drew  
Unto the wood's edge, and once more sat down  
Upon the fresh grass and the oak-leaves brown.

And there beneath the quickly sinking sun  
She took again her foot-gear cast aside,  
And, now scarce seeing them, she did them on ;  
And while the pie from out the oak-boughs cried  
Over her head, arose and slowly hied  
Unto the road again, and backward turned  
Up through the pass. Blood-red behind her burned

The sunless sky, and scarce awake she seemed,  
As 'gainst the hill she toiled, and when at last  
Beneath the moon far off the grey sea gleamed,  
And all the rugged mountain road was passed,  
Back from her eyes the wandering locks she cast,  
And o'er her cheeks warm ran the tears, as she  
Told herself tales of what she yet might be.

**B**UT cold awakening had she when she came  
Unto the half-deserted homestead gate,  
And she must think how she would take the blame  
That from her mother did her deed await,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Without a slave-like frightened frown at fate ;  
Must harden yet her heart once more to face  
Her father's wondering sigh at his hard case.

So when within the dimly-lighted hall  
Her mother's wrath brake out, as she did hear  
Her cold words, and her father's knife did fall  
Clattering adown ; then seemed all life so drear,  
Hapless and loveless, and so hard to bear,  
So little worth the bearing, that a pang  
Of very hate from out her heart up-sprang.

With cold eyes, but a smile on her red lips,  
She watched them ; how her father stooped again  
And took his knife, and how once more the chips  
Flew from the bowl half finished, but in vain,  
Because he saw it not ; she watched the rain  
Of tears wherewith her mother did bewail  
That all her joy in her one child should fail.

But when her mother's tears to sobs were turned  
The goodman rose and took her hand in his,  
And then, with sunken eyes for love that yearned,  
Gazed hard at her, and said, "Nay, child, some bliss  
Awaits thee surely yet ; enough it is ;  
Trouble and hunger shall not chase me long,  
The walls of one abiding-place are strong ;

"And thither now I go apace, my child."  
Askance she looked at him with steady eyes,  
But when she saw that midst his words he smiled

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

With trembling lips, then in her heart 'gan rise  
Strange thoughts that troubled her like memories  
And changed her face ; she drew her hands from him,  
And yet before her eyes his face waxed dim.

Then down the old man sat, and now began  
To talk of how their life went, and their needs,  
In cheerful strain ; and, even as a man,  
Unbeaten yet by fortune's spiteful deeds,  
Spoke of the troublous twisted way that leads  
To peace and happiness, till to a smile  
The goodwife's tearful face he did beguile.

So slipped the night away, and the June sun  
Rose the next morn as though no woe there were  
Upon the earth, and never any one  
Was blind with love or bent by hopeless care ;  
But small content was in the homestead there,  
Despite the bright-eyed June, for unto two  
That dwelt there life still held too much to do.

While to the third, empty of deeds it seemed,  
A dragging dulness changed by here a pain  
And there a hope, waking or sleeping dreamed,  
But, waking still or sleeping, dreamed in vain ;  
For how could anything be loss or gain  
When still the order of the world went round,  
And still the wall of death all hopes did bound ?

So said she oft, and fell to hating men ;  
Nevertheless with hope still beat her heart,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And changing thoughts that rose and fell again  
Would stir within her as she sat apart,  
And to her brow the unbidden blood would start,  
And she would rise, nor know whereon she trod,  
And forth she walked as one who walks with God.

Oftener indeed that dull and heavy mood  
Oppressed her, and when any were anigh,  
Little she spake, either of bad or good,  
Nor would she heed the folk that were thereby  
So much as thereon to look scornfully ;  
Unless perchance her father stood anear,  
And then her set hard face she strove to clear.

And if he, fearful, answered with no smile  
Unto the softening eyes, yet when he went  
About his labour, would he so beguile  
His heart with thought of her, that right content  
He 'gan to feel with what the Gods had sent ;  
The little flame of love that in him burned,  
Hard things and ill to part of pleasure turned.

Withal his worldly things went not so ill  
As for a luckless man ; the bounteous year  
More than before his barn and vats did fill  
With the earth's fruit, and bettered was his  
cheer,  
So that he watched the winter draw anear  
Calmly this tide, and deemed he yet might live,  
Some joy unto his daughter's heart to give.

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

But for the one shoe that the erne had left,  
The goodwife's word was, "Take the cursed thing,  
And when the gems from out of it are reft,  
Into the fire the weaver's rag go fling ;  
Would in like wise the fond desires, that cling  
Unto Rhodope's pride, we thus might burn,  
That she to some good life at last might turn !

"I think some poison with a double curse  
Hath smitten her, and double wilfulness,  
For surely now she groweth worse and worse,  
Since the bright rag her wayworn foot did press—  
Well then—and surely thou wilt do no less  
Than as I bid—a many things we need,  
More than this waif of cast-off royal weed."

With querulous voice she spake, because she saw  
Her husband eye Rhodope's face, as she  
Still through her fingers did the grey thread draw  
From out the rock, and sitting quietly  
Seemed not to heed what all the talk might be ;  
But for the goodman's self he answered not,  
Until at last the goodwife waxed o'er hot,

And laid hard word on word, till she began  
To say, "Alas, and wherefore was I wed  
To such an one as is a foredoomed man ?  
Lo, all this grief hast thou brought on my head,  
So wander forth, and dream as do the dead  
When to the shadowy land they first are brought !  
Surely thou knowest that we lack for nought !"

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then blind with rage from out the place she went,  
But still the goodman stood awhile, and gazed  
Upon Rhodope, sitting as intent  
Upon her work, nor aught her fair head raised.  
At last he spake: "Well, never was I praised  
For wisdom overmuch before this day,  
And can I now be certain of the way?"

"True is it that our needs are much and sore,  
And that those gems would help us plenteously,  
Yet do I grudge now more than heretofore  
The very last of that strange gift to see.  
What sayest thou, how dost thou counsel me,  
O daughter? didst thou ever hear folk tell  
Of the strange dream that at thy birth befell?"

Blood-red her face grew as she looked on him,  
And with her foot the twirling spindle stayed.  
"Yea," said she, "something have I heard, but dim  
My memory is, and little have I weighed  
The worth thereof." The goodman smiled and said,  
"Nay, child, as little wise as I may be,  
Yet know I that thou liest certainly.

"And so no need there is to tell the tale,  
Or ask thee more what thou wouldst have me do;  
Have thou thy will, for fate shall yet prevail,  
Though oft we deem we lead her thereunto  
Where lies our good—Daughter, keep thou the shoe,  
And let the wise men with their wisdom play,  
While we go dream about a happier day."

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

While he was speaking had she laid adown  
The rock, and risen unto her feet, and now  
Upon her bosom lay his visage brown,  
As round him both her fair arms did she throw ;  
Softly she said, " Somewhat thy need I know,  
Remember this whatever happeneth,  
Let it make sweet the space 'twixt this and death !

" Hard is the world ; I, loved ere I was born,  
This once alone perchance thy heart shall feel,  
And thou shalt go about, of love forlorn,  
And little move my heart of stone and steel :  
Ah, if another life our life might heal,  
And love become no more the sport of time,  
Chained upon either hand to pain and crime ! "

A little time she hung about him thus,  
And then her arms from round his neck unwound,  
And went her ways ; his mouth grew piteous  
When he had lost her fluttering gown's light sound,  
And fast his tears 'gan fall upon the ground.  
At last he turned : " So is it now," he said,  
" With me as with a man soon to be dead.

" Wise is he all at once, and knows not why,  
And brave who erst was timorous ; fair of speech,  
Whose tongue once stammered with uncertainty,  
Because his soul to the dark land doth reach.  
And is it so that love to me doth teach  
New things, because he needs must get him gone,  
And leave me with his memories all alone ? "

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

SO the year passed, as has been writ afore,  
With better hopes ; the pinching winter-tide  
Went by, and spring his tender longings bore  
Into all hearts, and scattered troubles wide,  
Nor yet to see the fruit of them would bide,  
But left the burning summer next to deal  
With hearts of men, and hope from them to steal.

Now came the time round even to the day  
Whereon Rhodope made her journey vain  
Unto the valley where the temple lay ;  
And now, too, when the morn was on the wane,  
Before the homestead door she stood again,  
For to the town she needs must go to bring,  
For their poor household work, some needful thing.

So with slow feet she crossed the threshold o'er  
With brow a little knitted, as if she  
Dealt with some troublous thought, that oft before  
Had mazed her mind : then no less, steadily  
Through the fair day she went on toward the sea,  
For by the port, and lying low adown,  
Stretched out their unwalled simple market-town.

Some mile of highway had she got to pace,  
Ere she might reach the first house of the street  
That led unto the lowly market-place ;  
So on she went, and still her eyes did meet



## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

The elm-tree shade that flickered o'er her feet.  
Though thronged beyond its wont the white way was,  
With folk well clad, who toward the town did pass,

Swiftly she went, till come half-way belike,  
Then stayed her feet and looked up suddenly ;  
There by the way-side the hot sun did strike  
Upon a patch of grass, whereon did lie  
A grey old hound, and 'gainst an elm thereby  
His master leaned, a shepherd older yet,  
Whose deep-sunk eyes her eyes unwitting met.

Therewith a knot of folk she had just passed  
Passed her in turn, maidens and youths they were,  
Blithe with their life and youth ; on her they cast  
Such looks as if they had a mind to jeer,  
Yet held back, some by wonder, some by fear,  
Went on a space until they deemed them free,  
Then through the summer day outburst their glee.

Her deep eyes followed them, and yet, indeed,  
As images she saw them ; there a space  
Musing she stood, then turned, and at slow speed  
Went back again to her abiding-place,  
Just as the old man moved his puckered face  
To speak some word to her ; and so at last,  
O'er her own threshold inward her feet passed.

Then to her sleeping-room she went, and knelt  
Beside a chest, and raised the lid, and drew  
From out the dark where year-long it had dwelt,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Remembered yet the while, the precious shoe,  
And dreamy over it awhile she grew,  
Then set it in her bosom, and went forth,  
Pondering o'er what her fond desires were worth.

Still folk thronged on the highway ; as she went  
Some fragment of their talk would reach her ear  
Howso upon her dreams she was intent ;  
Of new-come men they spake, their ways and gear,  
How glorious of array, how great they were,  
How huge and fair their galley, that last eve  
The little black-quayed haven did receive.

That talk of strange and great things raised at last  
New and wild hopes in her, but none the less  
Straightway unto her journey's end she passed,  
And did what she must do, nor cared to guess  
Why in the market-place all folk did press  
Around a glitter as of steel and gold  
That in the midst thereof she did behold.

Yet, her work done, she gat her back again  
Unto the market-place, and curiously  
'Gan eye the concourse, yea, at last, was fain  
Unto the core thereof to draw anigh ;  
Her heart beat ; strange she felt and knew not why,  
As on she went, and still the wondering folk  
To right and left before her beauty broke.

A temple midmost of the market-place,  
Raised to the mother of the Gods there stood,

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

An ancient house in guise of other days,  
And e'en amid that simple folk deemed rude ;  
Such as it was the country-folk thought good  
To meet and talk there, o'er such things as they  
Found hard to deal with as day passed by day.

So when she drew anigh its steps, thereon  
She saw indeed a goodly company,  
For there sat strange men, young and old, who  
shone  
In such attire as scarce she thought could be,  
And by these glittering folk from over sea  
Were the land's fathers, and the chief-priest dight  
To do a solemn sacrifice aright.

E'en as she came into the foremost rank,  
Bright gleamed the slayer's falchion in the sun,  
And silently the rose-crowned heifer sank  
Upon the time-worn pavement ; yet not one  
Of all the sea-farers might gaze upon  
Victim or priest, for forth stood Rhodope  
Lone on the steps, a glorious thing to see.

For on a tripod by the altar's side,  
Gleaming, as that day year agoe it gleamed,  
The shoe her foot had pressed she now espied,  
And o'er her soul a sudden light there streamed,  
While from her eager eyes such glory beamed,  
That all folk stared astonished, all must wait  
For her first word as for the stroke of fate.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Yea, there she stood, that all fair things did lack,  
Clad in a gown of dark grey woollen stuff,  
The wares she had just dealt for at her back,  
And all about her homely, coarse, and rough,  
Yet, since her beauty blessed them, good enough :  
For, as a goddess wandering on the earth,  
How might she deem earth's richest gauds of worth ?

Gently, yet with no flush on her smooth cheek,  
She mounted up the steps, and spake out clear :  
“ Perchance a match for yon fair thing ye seek  
Ye seem to prize so much ; it lieth here,  
And both of them on this day was-a-year  
Were on my feet. My father will be glad  
Because great joy in them the old man had.”

Then went a great shout up into the sky,  
And in despite herself the blood would rise  
Unto her cheek and brow, as quietly  
From her white fragrant bosom, a world's prize,  
She drew the mass of blazing 'broideries,  
And laid it by its fellow, and her hand  
Trembled, as there sun-litten she did stand.

Then cried a grey-beard, clad in gems and gold :  
“ Praise to the Gods who do all things aright,  
And thus have given my weak eyes to behold  
Now, at the end of life, so fair a sight,  
Have given withal unto the worth and might  
Of the great king so fair a mate as thee—  
How good, how good it is thine eyes to see !”

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

She was pale now, though ne'er a word she spake,  
And held her head, as though a crown it wore,  
And 'gan 'neath gold and golden hair to ache  
With new-born longings, fears unknown before,  
And calmly her deep eyes the men passed o'er  
Who sat there marvelling ; till the old man said :  
“ Wonder not overmuch, O glorious maid,

“ At all these things ! The Gods who wrought thee  
thus,  
And kept thee here apart from ill men's eyes  
To show thee forth so much more marvellous,  
Have led our hearts unto thee in this wise ;  
For the great king did solemn sacrifice  
Unto the Gods well-nigh a year agoe,  
And in the bright sun bright the altar shone.

“ But e'en as to its highest shot the flame,  
And to the awful Gods our hearts did turn,  
A cry from out the far blue sky there came,  
And a bright thing 'twixt flame and sun did burn,  
And some there were who said they could discern  
An eagle, like a faint speck, far above  
The altar, whereon lay this gift of love.

“ How this may be I know not, but the king  
Trembled, and toward the altar stretched his hand,  
And drew to him the strange-sent, fair-wrought thing,  
And, thereon staring, a long while did stand,  
And left the place, not giving such command  
As he was wont, and still from that day forth  
Took little heed of things once held of worth.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“Silent and pale, and strange-eyed still he grew,  
And yet said nought hereon for many days,  
Until at last he bade us take this shoe  
And diligently search in every place  
That we might come to, till we saw the face  
Of her whose foot had touched it. ‘Certainly,  
Whereso she is, she hath been wrought for me.

“‘Whereso she is, and by what name men name  
Her loveliness and love unknown: lo now,  
Young am I, and have heretofore had shame  
To bend to love, e’en as my folk bend low  
Before my throne, but now my pride doth grow  
As a quenched candle in a golden house,  
And through the dark I wander timorous.’

“We marvelled at his word, but deemed some God  
Possessed his heart; but thenceforth constantly  
Have we gone over the wide world, and trod  
Rough ways enow, been tossed o’er many a sea,  
And dealt with many a lie, until to thee  
The Gods have brought us, O thou wondrous one!  
That we might see thee ere our days are done.”

“Ah me!” she said, “what thing do ye demand?  
Is it a little thing that I should go,  
Leaving my people and my father’s land,  
To wed some proud great man I do not know?  
I look for no glad life; yea, it is so  
That if a grain of love were left in me  
In vain your keel had cleft our girdling sea.

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

“No need to speak ; I know what ye would say—  
—That where I go, still I and love shall rule,  
That where I go I bear about the day  
Made golden by my beauty—base and dull,  
Mid hollow shows to strive with knave and fool,  
With death, and nothing done, to end it all !  
—Yet fear ye not ! for surely I shall fall

“Where the Gods cast me, nor turn round about  
To gaze on bygone time—so it shall be  
E’en as ye will.” They stared at her, in doubt  
If her sweet lips had spoken ; yea, and she  
Flushed ’neath their eyes fixed on her wonderingly,  
Wondering herself at the new fear, new scorn  
That with beginning of new days was born.

But they, abased before the rough-clad maid,  
Now led her to an empty ivory chair,  
And each man knee unto the pavement laid,  
And, unashamed, did reverence to her there ;  
And ever did she seem to grow more fair  
Before their eyes, till fear arose in them  
As they bent down to her rude garment’s hem.

And then the rites unto the Gods went on,  
While she sat musing on the wondrous tale ;  
And when all these at last were duly done,  
They prayed her give command when they should sail ;  
She raised her face, grown quiet now and pale,  
And said in a low voice : “To-day were best,  
For here at least may I have nought of rest.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“The old is gone, the new is not yet come,  
Familiar things with strange eyes I behold,  
And nowhere now I seem to have a home.  
But when I go from homespun unto gold,  
My father and mother, poor folk bent and old,  
Beaten by fortune, needs must go with me,  
And share my new proud life beyond the sea.

“And since the old man loveth me too well,  
And hitherto small joy from me hath gained,  
Meet is it that my lips alone should tell  
How all is changed, and weal that long hath waned  
Is waxen now, and the cold rain that rained  
Upon his life's grey day hath met the sun,  
And blossoms spring from the dull earth and dun.

“And, O ye folk, midst whom my feet have dwelt,  
And whom I leave now, if so be, that I  
Hard anger in my heart at whiles have felt  
'Gainst things that pressed upon me wearily,  
Yet now the kindness of time past draws nigh,  
And ye will be my folk still, when I go  
Unto a land where e'en your name none know.”

Then, midst their marvelling silence, she arose,  
And took her cast-down fardel up again,  
And went her ways; and they, by whom all close  
Her body passed, must tremble, and be fain  
To think of common things to dull the pain  
Of longing, as her lovely majesty,  
Too sweet and strange for earth, brushed swiftly by.



## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

And yet of earth she was, and as she went  
Through the shrunk shadow to her old abode,  
Fresh hope a new joy through her body sent,  
The clear cold vision of her soul to cloud ;  
And less the striving world seemed like a load  
To weary her, than a strange curious toy,  
To solace life with foolish grief and joy.

Still grew that hope in her, and when she came  
Unto the homestead, and her father met  
Anigh the byre, then doubt, and fear, and shame,  
Amid the joy of change did she forget,  
As firm feet mid the loitering kine she set,  
And cried aloud, " O father, turn and gaze  
On Fortune's friend, the Queen of glorious days ! "

He turned and stared upon her glittering eyes  
And godlike mien, and 'gan to speak, but she  
Cried out, " The very Gods may call us wise,  
For great days have they given to thee and me,  
Things stranger than these meadows shall we see,  
And thou shalt wonder that thou e'er didst keep  
These kine, as Phœbus erst Admetus' sheep ! "

Then did she pour the whole tale out on him ;  
Eager at first, but faltered to behold  
How he fell trembling in his every limb ;  
Through the new fever that her heart did fold,  
Again shame thrust its steely point and cold :  
" Alas," she thought, " when all the tale is done,  
Why go we thus alone beneath the sun ? "

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

He tried to speak, and the words came at last ;  
“ If thou art glad, then surely I am glad—  
—And yet, we thought our evil time had passed ;  
Surely the days grew not so wholly bad !  
Ah me, a growing hope of late I had  
Of quiet days and sweet—yet shame of me,  
That I should dull the joy that gladdeth thee !

“ Daughter, thy bidding I will surely do,  
And go with thee ; nathless bethink thee yet,  
How yesterday shall seem full long ago,  
When with to-morrow’s dew the grass is wet.  
Child, I will pray thee never to forget  
This face of mine, this heart that loves thee well ;  
Let distance though, and time that sweet tale tell ! ”

She cried : “ Ah, wilt thou have me lonelier  
Than the Gods made me ? As day passes day  
The life of fear and hope that happened here,  
Most oft no doubt shall seem full far away ;  
Yet be thou nigh, to be a scarce-felt stay  
To my mazed steps, a green close fresh and sweet,  
On life’s hard way, to cool my weary feet.

“ I will not take my bidding back ; go thou,  
And get thee ready swiftly to be gone.  
The sails are flapping in the haven now,  
And we depart before the day is done.  
O be thou glad, thou shalt not be alone !  
Canst thou not see e’en now how this my face  
Is softened to thee by the happy days ? ”

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

He said no more, but eyed her lovingly,  
Upon his worn old face a trembling smile ;  
Then turned him toward the house with one great sigh,  
And she was left alone a little while,  
Her restlessness with strange dreams to beguile,  
And though bright things those dreams did nowise lack  
Yet oft oft-conquered cold fear would come back.

But midst her thoughts from out the house there came  
Her father and her mother, and she gazed  
Upon the twain with something more than shame,  
As she beheld what timid eyes and mazed  
The goodwife to her queenly beauty raised,  
And how with patient mien her father went,  
On all her motions lovingly intent.

Then to the market-place passed on the three,  
And though her grey gown only covered her,  
Her mother bore some shreds of bravery  
And clad her father was in scarlet gear,  
Worn now and wretched, that he once did bear  
When long ago at his rich board he sat,  
And all that land's best cheer the glad guests gat.

And as they stood there now, the simple folk,  
Grown used unto the wonder of the tale,  
Warmed with new joy, and into shouts outbroke ;  
The goodwife flushed, but the old man turned pale,  
And gazed round helpless, his limbs seemed to fail  
As though age pressed him sore ; Rhodope she  
Grew softer-eyed and spake majestically ;

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“Fain am I, lords, that we depart straightway ;  
For if a dream this is, I long full sore  
E’en in my dream to feel the wind-blown spray,  
And hear the well-timed rolling of the oar,  
And ere dark night behold the lessening shore  
From your dreamed dromond’s deck—so pass we on,  
If e’en so far as this my dream hath won.”

Then said they : “ All is ready in due wise,  
E’en as thou bad’st, the ship has been warped round  
And rideth toward the sea, and sacrifice  
Has there been done, and goodly gifts been found  
For this land’s folk : but wilt thou not be crowned  
And clad in fair array of gold, that we  
May show thy beauty meetly to the sea ? ”

“Nay,” said she, “in this lowly guise of mine  
Let the king first behold me standing there  
The Gods’ gift, that his heart may more incline  
Towards mine, if thus he note me strange and fair,  
Grown up a queen, yet with no wondrous care  
For what I should be. Make no more delay,  
Low looks the sun upon the watery way.”

So seaward now with these all people moved  
Rejoicing, though belike they scarce knew why,  
And now Rhodope felt herself beloved ;  
And as the south wind breathed deliciously  
O’er flowers and sweet things, and the sun did die  
Amid soft golden haze, her loveliness  
She ’gan to feel, and all the world to bless.

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

In her slim hand her father's hand she took,  
Her red lips trembled, and her eyes were wet  
With tears that fell not ; but the old man shook  
As one who sees death ; then a hand she set  
Upon his shoulder, and said, " Long years yet,  
With loving eyes these eyes shalt thou behold  
Among the glimmer of fair things and gold."

But nought he answered, and they came full soon  
To where the gangway ran from out the ship  
On to the black pier ; white yet was the moon,  
And the sun's rim nigh in the sea did dip,  
And from the place where sky met ocean's lip,  
Ran a great road of gold across the sea,  
Where played the unquiet waves impatiently.

Now was her foot upon the gangway plank ;  
Now over the green depths and oars blood-red  
Fluttered her gown, and from the low green bank  
Above the sea a cry came, as her head  
Gleamed golden in the way that westward led,  
And on the deck her feet were, but no more  
She looked back then unto the peopled shore.

But with one hand held back as if to take  
Her father's hand, she went on toward the prow ;  
And there she stood, and watched the billows break,  
Nor noted when men back the ropes did throw,  
And scarce knew when the sea fell from the bow  
And the ship moved, nor turned, till, cold and grey,  
And darkling fast, the waste before her lay.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But at the last she turned on well-poised feet,  
And gazed adown the twilight decks, and heard  
The freshening wind about the cordage beat,  
The master's and rough helmsman's answering word,  
And all alone she felt now, and afeard,  
In spite of all the folk who stood around,  
Unto her lightest service straightly bound.

A terror seized her ; down the deck she passed,  
Her gown driven close against her, and her hair  
Loosed by the driving wind ; till at the mast  
She stayed, and muttered : " Ah, he is not there !  
And I, where am I ? the dream seemed so fair  
When it began ; but now am I alone,  
Waiting, I know not what, till life be done."

Trembling she drew her hand across her brow  
As one who wakes ; and then, grown calm once more,  
She went with steady feet unto the prow,  
And ran the line of reverent faces o'er  
With anxious eyes, and stayed at last before  
The ancient grey-haired man, the chief of these,  
And spoke amid the washing of the seas :

" Where is my father ? I am fain to speak  
Of many things with him, we two alone ;  
For mid these winds and waves my heart grows weak  
With memory of the days for ever gone."  
The moon was bright, the swaying lanterns shone  
On her pale face, and fluttering garment's hem—  
—Each stared on each, and silence was on them.

## THE STORY OF RHODOPE

And midst that silence a new lonely pain,  
Like sundering death, smote on her, till he spoke :  
“ O queen, what sayst thou ? the old man was fain,  
He told us, still to dwell among his folk ;  
He said, thou knew'st he might not bear the yoke  
Of strange eyes watching him—what say I more,  
Surely thou know'st he never left the shore ?

“ I deemed him wise and true : but give command  
If so thou willest ; certes no great thing  
It is, in two hours' space to make the land,  
Though much the land-wind now is freshening.”  
One slender hand to the rough shroud did cling,  
As her limbs failed ; she raised the other one,  
And moved her lips to bid the thing be done :

Yet no words came, she stood upright again,  
And dropped her hand and said, “ I strive with change,  
I strive with death the Gods' toy, but in vain :  
No otherwise than thus might all be strange.”  
Therewith she turned, her unseeing eyes did range  
Wide o'er the tumbling waste of waters grey,  
As swift the black ship went upon her way.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

**D**ARK night upon the cold still eve did fall  
Amidst the tale, and now the fair guest-hall  
Was lit with nought but firelight, as they sat,  
Silent, soft-hearted, and compassionate  
Midst their own flickering shadows; yet too old  
They were, to talk about the story told,  
Too old, and knew too well what each man thought,  
And feared in any pleasure to be caught,  
That hid a snare of sadness at its end.  
So slowly did the tale's sweet sorrow blend  
With their own quenched desires, and past regret,  
And dear-loved follies they might scarce forget;  
That in these latter days indeed, were grown  
Nought but a tale, for others to bemoan,  
Who had not learned with sorrow's self to deal;  
Who had no need an hour of bliss to steal,  
With trembling hands, from the dark treasury  
Of time long unregarded, long gone by,  
Where cobwebbed o'er amid the dust it lay.

But these stole not, nor strove, from day to day  
Enough of pleasure to their lot did fall  
To stay them, that on death they should not call  
With change or rest to end the weary tide;  
Though careless now, his coming did they bide.



## NOVEMBER

SCARCE aught was left of autumn-tide to die  
When next they met; the north-east wind rushed by  
The house anigh the woods, wherein they were,  
And in the oaks and hollies might they hear  
Its roar grow greater with the dying morn :  
A hard grey day it was, yet scarce forlorn,  
Since scarcely aught of tender or of sweet  
Was left the year, its ruggedness to meet.  
Bare was the country-side of work and folk :  
There from the hill-side stead straight out the smoke,  
Over the climbing row of corn-ricks, sailed ;  
And few folk stirred ; a blue-clad horseman hailed  
A shepherd from the white way, little heard  
'Twixt ridge and hollow by November seared ;  
The ferryman stared long adown the road  
That led unto his tottering thatched abode,  
Ere the dark speck into a goodwife turned ;  
The smouldering weed-heap by the garden burned ;  
Side-long the plough beside the field-gate lay,  
With no one nigh to scare the birds away,  
That twittered mid the scanty wisps of straw.  
So round the fire the ancient folk did draw,  
And, mid the day-dreams, that hung round about,  
Rather beheld the wild-wood dim with doubt,  
And twilight of the cloudy leafless tide,  
Than the scant-peopled fallow country-side,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Whose fields the woods hemmed in : the world grew old  
Unto their eyes, and lacked house, field, and fold.

Then spake a wanderer ; “ Long the tale I tell,  
Though in few years the deeds thereof befell,  
In a strange land and barren, far removed  
From southlands and their bliss ; yet folk beloved,  
Yearning for love, striving ’gainst change and hate,  
Strong, uncomplaining, yet compassionate,  
Have dwelt therein—a strange and awful land  
Where folk, as in the hollow of God’s hand,  
Beset with fearful things yet fearing nought,  
Have lived their lives and wondrous deeds have  
wrought—

Wild deeds, as other men. Yet these at least,  
If death from but a rough and homely feast  
Drew them away, lived not so full of care,  
They and their sons, but that their lives did bear  
The fruit of deeds recorded. Bear with me  
If I shall seem to hold this history  
Of a few freemen of the farthest north,  
A handful, as a thing of too much worth ;  
Because this Iceland was my fathers’ home,  
Nay, somewhat of the selfsame stock they come  
As these I tell of : know withal that we  
Have ever deemed this tale as true to be,  
As though those very Dwellers in Laxdale  
Risen from the dead had told us their own tale ;  
Who for the rest while yet they dwelt on earth  
Wearied no God with prayers for more of mirth  
Than dying men have ; nor were ill-content

## NOVEMBER

Because no God beside their sorrow went  
Turning to flowery sward the rock-strewn way,  
Weakness to strength, or darkness into day.  
Therefore, no marvels hath my tale to tell,  
But deals with such things as men know too well ;  
All that I have herein your hearts to move,  
Is but the seed and fruit of bitter love."

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

### ARGUMENT

THIS story shows how two friends loved a fair woman, and how he who loved her best had her to wife, though she loved him little or not at all; and how one of these two friends gave shame to and received death of the other, who in his turn came to his end by reason of that deed.

#### *Of Herdholt and Bathstead*

**H**ERDHOLT my tale names for the stead, where erst  
Olaf the Peacock dwelt, nowise the worst  
Among the great men of a noble day :  
Upon a knoll amidst a vale it lay,  
Nigh where Laxriver meets the western sea,  
And in that day it nourished plenteously  
Great wealth of sheep and cattle.

Ye shall know  
That Olaf to a mighty house did go  
To take to him a wife : Thorgerd he gat,  
The daughter of the man at Burg who sat,  
After a great life, with eyes waxing dim,  
Egil, the mighty son of Skallagrim.  
Now of the sons the twain had, first we name  
Kiartan alone, for eld's sake and for fame,  
Then Steinthor, Haldor, Helgi, and Hauskuld,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

All of good promise, strong and lithe and bold,  
Yet little against Kiartan's glory weighed ;  
Besides these props the Peacock's house that stayed,  
Two maidens, Thurid, Thorbiorg there were ;  
And furthermore a youth was fostered there,  
Whom Thorleik, Olaf's brother, called his son :  
Bodli his name was. Thus the tale is done  
Of those who dwelt at Herdholt in those days.

Midst the grey slopes, Bathstead its roof did raise  
Seven miles from Herdholt ; Oswif, wise of men,  
Who Thordis had to wife, abode there then  
With his five sons, of whom let names go past  
That are but names ; but these were first and last,  
Ospak and Thorolf : never, says my tale,  
That Oswif's wisdom was of much avail  
In making these, though they were stout enow ;  
But in his house a daughter did there grow  
To perfect womanhood, Gudrun by name,  
Whose birth the wondering world no more might blame  
Than her's who erst called Tyndarus her sire,  
What hearts soe'er, what roof-trees she might fire,  
What hearts soe'er, what hearths she might leave cold,  
Before the ending of the tale be told.

But where we take the story up, fifteen  
The maiden's years were ; Kiartan now had seen  
His eighteenth spring, and younger by a year  
Was Bodli, son of Thorleik.

Now most fair  
Seemed Olaf's lot in life, and scarcely worse  
Was Oswif's, and what shadow of a curse

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Might hang o'er either house, was thought of now  
As men think of a cloud the mountain's brow  
Hides from their eyes an hour before the rain ;  
For so much love there was betwixt the twain,  
Herdholt and Bathstead, that it well might last  
Until the folk aforenamed were all passed  
From out the world ; but herein shall be shown  
How the sky blackened, and the storm swept down.

### *The Prophecy of Guest the Wise*

UPON a day, amid the maids that spun  
Within the bower at Bathstead, sat Gudrun :  
Her father in the firth a-fishing was,  
The while her mother through the meads did pass  
About some homely work. So there she sat,  
Nor set her hand to this work or to that,  
And a half-frown was on her pensive face,  
Nor did she heed the chatter of the place  
As girl spake unto girl. Then did she hear  
The sound of horse-hoofs swiftly drawing near,  
And started up, and cried, " That shall be Guest,  
Riding, as still his wont is, from the west  
Unto the Thing, and this is just the day  
When he is wont at Bathstead to make stay."

Then to the door she went, and with slim hand  
Put it aback, and 'twixt the posts did stand,  
And saw therewith a goodly company  
Ride up the grey slopes leading from the sea.

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

That spring was she just come to her full height ;  
Low-bosomed yet she was, and slim and light,  
Yet scarce might she grow fairer from that day ;  
Gold were the locks wherewith the wind did play,  
Finer than silk, waved softly like the sea  
After a three days' calm, and to her knee  
Well-nigh they reached ; fair were the white hands laid  
Upon the door-posts where the dragons played ;  
Her brow was smooth now, and a smile began  
To cross her delicate mouth, the snare of man ;  
For some thought rose within the heart of her  
That made her eyes bright, her cheeks ruddier  
Than was their wont, yet were they delicate  
As are the changing steps of high heaven's gate ;  
Bluer than grey her eyes were ; somewhat thin  
Her marvellous red lips ; round was her chin,  
Cloven, and clear-wrought ; like an ivory tower  
Rose up her neck from love's white-veiled bower.

But in such lordly raiment was she clad,  
As midst its threads the scent of southlands had,  
And on its hem the work of such-like hands  
As deal with silk and gold in sunny lands.  
Too dainty seemed her feet to come anear  
The guest-worn threshold-stone. So stood she there,  
And rough the world about her seemed to be,  
A rude heap cast up from the weary sea.

But now the new-come folk, some twelve in all,  
Drew rein before the doorway of the hall,  
And she a step or two across the grass  
Unto the leader of the men did pass,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

A white-haired elder clad in kirtle red :  
"Be welcome here, O Guest the Wise!" she said,  
"My father honours me so much that I  
Am bid to pray thee not to pass us by,  
But bide here for a while; he says withal  
That thou and he together in the hall  
Are two wise men together, two who can  
Talk cunningly about the ways of man."

Guest laughed, and leapt from off his horse, and said :  
"Fair words from fair lips, and a goodly stead,  
But unto Thickwood must I go to-night  
To give my kinsman Armod some delight ;  
Nevertheless here will we rest a while,  
And thou and I with talk an hour beguile,  
For so it is that all men say of thee,  
'Not far off falls the apple from the tree,'  
That 'neath thy coif some day shall lie again  
When he is dead, the wise old Oswif's brain."

With that he took her hand, and to the hall  
She led him, and his fellows one and all  
Leapt to the ground, and followed clattering  
In through the porch, and many a goodly thing  
There had they plenteously; but mid the noise  
And rattling horns and laughter, with clear voice  
Spake Gudrun unto Guest, and ever he  
Smiled at her goodly sayings joyfully,  
And yet at whiles grew grave; yea, and she too,  
Though her eyes glistened, seemed as scarce she knew  
The things she said. At last, amid their speech,  
The old man stayed his hand as it did reach



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Out to the beaker, and his grey eyes stared  
As though unseen things to his soul were bared ;  
Then Gudrun waited trembling, till he said :

“Liest thou awake at midnight in thy bed,  
Thinking of dreams dreamed in the winter-tide,  
When the north-east, turned off the mountain-side,  
Shook the stout timbers of the hall, as when  
They shook in Norway ere the upland men  
Bore axe against them?”

She spake low to him :

“So is it, but of these the most wax dim  
When daylight comes again ; but four there are—  
Four dreams in one—that bring me yet great care,  
Nor may I soon forget them, yea, they sink  
Still deeper in my soul—but do thou drink,  
And tell me merry tales ; of what avail  
To speak of things that make a maiden pale  
And a man laugh?”

“Speak quick,” he said, “before  
This glimmer of a sight I have is o’er.”

Then she delayed not, but in quick words said :  
“Methought that with a coif upon my head  
I stood upon a stream-side, and withal  
Upon my heart the sudden thought did fall  
How foul that coif was, and how ill it sat,  
And though the folk beside me spoke ’gainst that,  
Nevertheless, from off mine head I tore  
The cursed thing, and cast it from the shore ;  
And glad at heart was I when it was gone,  
And woke up laughing.”

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“Well, the second one,”  
Said Guest; “Make good speed now, and tell me all!”

“This was the dream,” she said, “that next did fall:  
By a great water was I; on mine arm  
A silver ring, that more my heart did charm  
Than one might deem that such a small thing might;  
My very own indeed seemed that delight,  
And long I looked to have it; but as I  
Stood and caressed the dear thing, suddenly  
It slipped from off my arm, and straightway fell  
Into the water: nor is more to tell  
But that I wept thereat, and sorrowed sore  
As for a friend that I should see no more.”

“As great,” said Guest, “is this thing as the last,  
What follows after?”

“O’er the road I passed  
Nigh Bathstead,” said she, “in fair raiment clad,  
And on mine arm a golden ring I had;  
And seemly did I deem it, yet the love  
I had therefor was not so much above  
That wherewithal I loved the silver ring,  
As gold is held by all a dearer thing  
Than silver is; now, whatso worth it bore,  
Methought that needs for longer than before  
This ring should give me what it might of bliss;  
But even as with foolish dreams it is  
So was it now; falling I seemed to be,  
And spread my arms abroad to steady me;  
Upon a stone the ring smote, and atwain

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

It broke ; and when I stooped the halves to gain,  
Lo, blood ran out from either broken place ;  
Then as I gazed thereon I seemed to trace  
A flaw within the craftsman's work, whereby  
The fair thing brake ; yea, withal presently  
Yet other flaws therein could I discern ;  
And as I stood and looked, and sore did yearn,  
Midst blind regrets, rather than raging pain,  
For that fair thing I should not see again,  
My eyes seemed opened, to my heart it came,  
Spite of those flaws, that on me lay the blame  
Why thus was spoiled that noble gift and rare,  
Because therewith I dealt not with due care :  
So with a sigh I woke."

" Ill fare," said Guest,  
" Three of thy dreams, tell now about the rest."

" This is the last of the four dreams," she said ;  
" Methought I had a helm upon my head,  
Wrought all of gold, with precious gems beset,  
And pride and joy I had therein, and yet,  
So heavy was it, that I scarce might hold  
My head upright for that great weight of gold ;  
Yet for all that I laid no blame or wrong  
Upon it, and I fain had kept it long ;  
But amid this, while least I looked therefor,  
Something, I knew not what, the fair helm tore  
From off mine head, and then I saw it swept  
Into the firth, and when I would have wept  
Then my voice failed me, and mine eyes were dry  
Despite my heart ; and therewith presently

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

I woke, and heard withal the neat-herd's song  
As o'er the hard white snow he went along  
Unto the byre, shouldering his load of hay ;  
Then knew I the beginning of the day,  
And to the window went and saw afar  
The wide firth, black beneath the morning-star,  
And all the waste of snow, and saw the man  
Dark on the slope ; 'twixt the dead earth and wan,  
And the dark vault of star-besprinkled sky,  
Croaking, a raven toward the sea did fly—  
—With that I fell a yearning for the spring,  
And all the pleasant things that it should bring,  
And lay back in my bed and shut my eyes,  
To see what pictures to my heart would rise,  
And slept, but dreamed no more ; now spring is here—  
Thou know'st perchance, made wise with many a year,  
What thing it is I long for ; but to me  
All grows as misty as the autumn sea  
'Neath the first hoar-frost, and I name it not,  
The thing wherewith my wondering heart is hot."

Then Guest turned round upon her, with a smile  
Beholding her fair face a little while,  
And as he looked on her she hid her eyes  
With slim hands, but he saw the bright flush rise,  
Despite of them, up to her forehead fair ;  
Therewith he sighed as one who needs must bear  
A heavy burden.

"Since thou thus hast told  
Thy dreams," he said, "scarce may I now withhold  
The tale of what mine eyes have seen therein ;

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Yet little from my foresight shalt thou win,  
Since both the blind, and they who see full well,  
Go the same road, and leave a tale to tell  
Of interwoven miseries, lest they,  
Who after them a while on earth must stay,  
Should have no pleasure in the winter night,  
When this man's pain is made that man's delight."

He smiled an old man's smile, as thus he spake,  
Then said, "But I must hasten ere it break,  
The thin sharp thread of light that yet I see—  
—Methinks a stirring life shall hap to thee.  
Thou shalt be loved and love; wrongs shalt thou give,  
Wrongs shalt thou take, and therewithal outlive  
Both wrongs, and love, and joy, and dwell alone  
When all the fellows of thy life are gone.  
Nay, think not I can tell thee much of this,  
How it shall hap, the sorrow or the bliss;  
Only foreshadowing of outward things,  
Great, and yet not the greatest, dream-lore brings.

"For whereas of the ill coif thou didst dream,  
That such a husband unto me doth seem  
As thou shalt think mates thee but ill enow,  
Nor shall love-longings bind thee; so shalt thou  
By thine own deed shake off this man from thee.

"But next the ring of silver seems to me,  
Another husband, loved and loving well;  
But even as the ring from off thee fell  
Into the water, so it is with him,  
The sea shall make his love and promise dim.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“But for the gold ring ; thou shalt wed again  
A worthier man belike—yet well-nigh vain  
My strivings are to see what means the gold  
Thou lovedst not more than silver : I am old  
And thou art very young ; hadst thou my sight,  
Perchance herein thou wouldst have more of might.  
But my heart says, that on the land there comes  
A faith that telleth of more lovesome homes  
For dead men, than we deemed of heretofore,  
And that this man full well shall know that lore.  
But whereas blood from out this ring did run,  
By the sword’s edge his life shall be foredone :  
Then for the flaws—see thou thyself to these !  
Thou knowest how a thing full well may please,  
When first thou hast it in thine hold, until  
Up to the surface float the seeds of ill,  
And vain regret o’er all thy life is spread.

“But for the heavy helm that bowed thine head—  
This, thy last husband, a great chief shall be,  
And hold a helm of terror over thee  
Though thou shalt love him : at the end of life  
His few last minutes shall he spend in strife  
With the wild waves of Hwammfirth, and in vain,  
For him too shall the white sea-goddess gain.

“So is thy dream areded ; but these things  
Shall hang above thee, as on unheard wings  
The kestrel hangs above the mouse ; nor more  
As erst I said shalt thou gain by my lore  
Than at the end of life, perchance, a smile

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

That fate with sight and blindness did beguile  
Thine eyes in such sort—that thou knewst the end,  
But not the way whereon thy feet did wend  
On any day amid the many years,  
Wherethrough thou waitedst for the flood of tears,  
The dreariness that at some halting-place,  
Waited in turn to change thy smiling face.  
Be merry yet! these things shall not be all  
That unto thee in this thy life shall fall.”

Amid these latter words of his, the may  
From her fair face had drawn her hands away,  
And sat there with fixed eyes, and face grown pale,  
As one who sees the corner of the veil,  
That hideth strange things, lifted for a while;  
But when he ceased, she said with a faint smile  
And trembling lips:

“Thanked be thou; well it is!  
From thee I get no promise of vain bliss,  
And constant joy; a tale I might have had  
From flattering lips to make my young heart glad—  
Yea, have my thanks!—yet wise as thou mayst be,  
Mayst thou not dimly through these tangles see?”

He answered nought, but sat awhile with eyes  
Distraught and sad, and face made over wise  
With many a hard vain struggle; but at last  
As one who from him a great weight doth cast,  
He rose and spake to her:

“Wild words, fair may,  
Now time it is that we were on our way.”

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then unto him her visage did she turn,  
In either cheek a bright red spot did burn,  
Her teeth were set hard, and her brow was knit  
As though she saw her life and strove with it.  
Yet presently but common words she spake,  
And bid him bide yet for her father's sake,  
To make him joyful when the boards were laid ;  
But certainly, whatever words she said,  
She heeded little, only from her tongue  
By use and wont clear in his ears they rung.  
Guest answered as before, that he would ride,  
Because that night at Thickwood must he bide ;  
So silent now with wandering weary eyes  
She watched his men do on their riding guise,  
Then led him from the hall but listlessly,  
As though she heeded nought where she might be.  
So forth he rode, but turned and backward gazed  
Before his folk the garth-gate latch had raised,  
And saw her standing yet anigh the hall,  
With her long shadow cast upon its wall,  
As with her eyes turned down upon the ground  
A long lock of her hair she wound and wound  
About her hand. Then turning once again,  
He passed the gate and shook his bridle-rein.

Now but a short way had he gone ere he  
Beheld a man draw nigh their company,  
Who, when they met, with fair words Guest did greet,  
And said that Olaf Peacock bade him meet  
Him and his men, and bid them to his stead :

“ And well ye wot, O Goodman Guest,” he said,



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

“That all day long it snoweth meat and drink  
At Herdholt, and the gurgle and the clink  
Of mead and horns, the harp alone doth still.”

Guest laughed, and said, “Well, be that as it will,  
Get swiftly back, and say that I will come  
To look upon the marvels of his home  
And hear his goodly voice; but may not bide  
The night through, for to Thickwood must I ride.”

Then the man turned and smote his horse; but they  
Rode slowly by the borders of the bay  
Upon that fresh and sunny afternoon,  
Noting the sea-birds’ cry and surf’s soft tune,  
Until at last into the dale they came,  
And saw the gilt roof-ridge of Herdholt flame  
In the bright sunlight over the fresh grass,  
O’er which the restless white-woolled lambs did pass,  
And querulous grey ewes; and wide around,  
Near and far up the dale, they heard the sound  
Of lowing kine, and the blithe neat-herd’s voice,  
For in those days did all things there rejoice.  
Now presently from out the garth they saw  
A goodly company unto them draw,  
And thitherward came Olaf and his men;  
So joyous greeting was betwixt them when  
They met, and side by side the two chiefs rode,  
Right glad at heart unto the fair abode.

Great-limbed was Olaf Hauskuldson, well knit,  
And like a chief upon his horse did sit;  
Clear-browed and wide-eyed was he, smooth of skin  
Through fifty rough years; of his mother’s kin,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The Erse king's daughter, did his short lip tell,  
And dark-lashed grey-blue eyes ; like a clear bell  
His voice was yet, despite of waves and wind,  
And such a goodly man you scarce might find,  
As for his years, in all the northern land.  
He held a gold-wrought spear in his right hand,  
A chief's gold ring his left arm did upbear,  
And as a mighty king's was all his gear,  
Well shaped of Flanders cloth, and silk and gold.  
Thus they their way up to the garth did hold,  
And Thord the Short, Guest's son, was next thereby,  
A brisk man and a brave ; so presently  
They passed the garth-wall, and drew rein before  
The new-built hall's well-carven, fair porch-door,  
And Guest laughed out with pleasure, to behold  
Its goodly fashion, as the Peacock told  
With what huge heed and care the place was wrought,  
And of the Norway earl's great wood, he brought  
Over the sea ; then in they went and Guest  
Gazed through the cool dusk, till his eyes did rest  
Upon the noble stories, painted fair  
On the high panelling and roof-boards there ;  
For over the high-seat, in his ship there lay  
The gold-haired Baldur, god of the dead day,  
The spring-flowers round his high pile, waiting there  
Until the Gods thereto the torch should bear ;  
And they were wrought on this side and on that,  
Drawing on towards him. There was Frey, and sat  
On the gold-bristled boar, who first they say  
Ploughed the brown earth, and made it green for Frey.  
Then came dark-bearded Niörd ; and after him

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Freyia, thin-robed, about her ankles slim  
The grey cats playing. In another place  
Thor's hammer gleamed o'er Thor's red-bearded face ;  
And Heimdall, with the gold horn slung behind,  
That in the God's-dusk he shall surely wind,  
Sickening all hearts with fear ; and last of all  
Was Odin's sorrow wrought upon the wall,  
As slow-paced, weary-faced, he went along,  
Anxious with all the tales of woe and wrong  
His ravens, Thought and Memory, bring to him.

Guest looked on these until his eyes grew dim,  
Then turned about, and had no word to praise,  
So wrought in him the thought of those strange days  
Done with so long ago. But furthermore  
Upon the other side, the deeds of Thor  
Were duly done ; the fight in the far sea  
With him who rings the world's iniquity,  
The Midgard Worm ; strife in the giants' land,  
With snares and mockeries thick on either hand,  
And dealings with the Evil One who brought  
Death even amid the Gods—all these well wrought  
Did Guest behold, as in a dream, while still  
His joyous men the echoing hall did fill  
With many-voiced strange clamour, as of these  
They talked, and stared on all the braveries.

Then to the presses in the cloth-room there  
Did Olaf take him, and showed hangings fair  
Brought from the southlands far across the sea,  
And English linen and fair napery,  
And Flemish cloth ; then back into the hall

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

He led him, and took arms from off the wall,  
And let the mail-coat rings run o'er his hands,  
And strung strange bows brought from the fiery lands  
Then through the butteries he made him pass,  
And, smiling, showed what winter stock yet was ;  
Fish, meal, and casks of wine, and goodly store  
Of honey, that the bees had grumbled o'er  
In clover fields of Kent. Out went they then  
And saw in what wise Olaf's serving-men  
Dealt with the beasts, and what fair stock he had,  
And how the maids were working blithe and glad  
Within the women's chamber. Then at last,  
Guest smiled, and said :

“ Right fair is all thou hast,  
A noble life thou livest certainly,  
And in such wise as now, still may it be,  
Nor mayst thou know beginning of ill days !  
Now let it please thee that we go our ways,  
E'en as I said, for the sun falleth low.”

“ So be it then,” said he. “ Nor shalt thou go  
Giftless henceforth ; and I will go with thee  
Some little way, for we my sons may see ;  
And fain I am to know how to thine eyes  
They seem, because I know thee for most wise,  
And that the cloud of time from thee hides less  
Than from most men, of woe or happiness.”

With that he gave command, and men brought forth  
Two precious things ; a hat of goodly worth,  
Of fur of Russia, with a gold chain wound

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Thrice round it, and a coin of gold that bound  
The chain's end in the front, and on the same  
A Greek king's head was wrought, of mighty fame  
In olden time ; this unto Guest he gave,  
And smiled to see his deep-set eyes and grave  
Gleam out with joy thereover : but to Thord,  
Guest's son, he gave a well-adornéd sword  
And English-'broidered belt ; and then once more  
They mounted by the goodly carven door,  
And to their horses gat all Guest's good men,  
And forth they rode toward Laxriver : but when  
They had just overtopped a low knoll's brow,  
Olaf cried out, " There play hot hearts enow  
In the cold waves ! " Then Guest looked, and afar  
Beheld the tide play on the sandy bar  
About the stream's mouth, as the sea waves rushed  
In over it and back the land-stream pushed ;  
But in the dark wide pool mid foam-flecks white,  
Beneath the slanting afternoon sunlight,  
He saw white bodies sporting, and the air  
Light from the south-west up the slopes did bear  
Sound of their joyous cries as there they played.

Then said he, " Goodman, thou art well apaid  
Of thy fair sons, if they shall deal as well  
With earth as water."

" Nought there is to tell  
Of great deeds at their hands as yet," said he ;  
" But look you, how they note our company ! "

For waist-high from the waves one rose withal,  
And sent a shrill voice like a sea-mew's call

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Across the river, then all turned toward land,  
And beat the waves to foam with foot and hand,  
And certes kept no silence ; up the side  
They scrambled, and about the shore spread wide  
Seeking their raiment, and the yellowing sun  
Upon the line of moving bodies shone,  
As running here and there with laugh and shout  
They flung the linen and grey cloth about,  
Yet spite of all their clamour clad them fast.  
So Guest and Olaf o'er the green slopes passed  
At sober pace, the while the other men  
Raced down to meet the swimmers.

“ Many then  
There are, who have no part or lot in thee  
Among these lads,” said Guest.

“ Yea, such there be,”  
Said Olaf, “ sons of dale-dwellers hereby ;  
But Kiartan rules the swimming.”

Earnestly  
Guest gazed upon the lads as they drew near,  
And scarcely now he seemed the words to hear  
That Olaf spake, who talked about his race  
And how they first had dwelling in that place ;  
But at the last Guest turned his horse about  
Up stream, and drew rein, yet, as one in doubt,  
Looked o'er his shoulder at the youths withal ;  
But nought said Olaf, doubting what should fall  
From those wise lips.

Then Guest spake, “ Who are these ?  
Tell me their names ; yon lad upon his knees,  
Turning the blue cloak over with his hands,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

While over him a sturdy fellow stands,  
Talking belike ? ”

“ Hauskuld, my youngest son,”  
Said Olaf, “ kneels there, but the standing one  
Is An the Black, my house-carle, a stout man.”

“ Good,” Guest said ; “ name the one who e’en  
now ran  
Through upraised hands a glittering silver chain,  
And, as we look now, gives it back again  
Unto a red-haired youth, tall, fair, and slim.”

“ Haldor it was who gave the chain to him,  
And Helgi took it,” Olaf said.

Then Guest :  
“ There kneeleth one in front of all the rest,  
Less clad than any there, and hides from me  
Twain who are sitting nigher to the sea ? ”

Then Olaf looked with shaded eyes and said :  
“ Steinthor, the sluggard, is it, by my head  
He hideth better men ! nay, look now, look ! ”

Then toward the stream his spear-butt Olaf shook  
As Steinthor rose, and gat somewhat aside,  
And showed the other twain he first did hide.  
On a grey stone anigh unto the stream  
Sat a tall youth whose golden head did gleam  
In the low sun ; half covered was his breast,  
His right arm bare as yet, a sword did rest  
Upon his knees, and some half-foot of it

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

He from the sheath had drawn ; a man did sit  
Upon the grass before him ; slim was he,  
Black-haired and tall, and looked up smilingly  
Into the other's face, with one hand laid  
Upon the sword-sheath nigh the broad grey blade,  
And seemed as though he listened.

Then spake Guest :

“ No need, O friend, to ask about the rest,  
Since I have seen these ; for without a word  
Kiartan I name the man who draws the sword  
From out the sheath, and low down in the shade  
Before him Bodli Thorleikson is laid.  
But tell me of that sword, who bore it erst ? ”

Then Olaf laughed, “ Some call that sword accursed ;  
Bodli now bears it, which the Eastlander  
Geirmund, my daughter's husband, once did wear.  
Hast thou not heard the tale ? he won the maid  
By my wife's word, wherefor with gold he paid,  
Or so I deemed ; but whereas of good kin  
The man was, and the women hot herein,  
I stood not in the way ; well, but his love,  
Whate'er it was, quenched not his will to rove ;  
He left her, but would nowise leave the sword,  
And so she helped herself, and for reward  
Got that, and a curse with it, babblers say.  
—Let see if it prevail 'gainst my good day ! ”

Guest answered nought at all, his head was turned  
Eastward, away from where the low sun burned  
Above the swimmers. Olaf spake once more :



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

“Wise friend, thou thus hast heard their names told o’er,  
How thinkest thou? hast thou the heart to tell  
Which in the years to come shall do right well?”

Guest spake nought for a while, and then he said,  
But yet not turning any more his head :  
“Surely of this at least thou wouldst be glad,  
If Kiartan while he lived more glory had  
Than any man now waxing in the land.”

Then even as he spoke he raised his hand  
And smote his horse, and rode upon his way  
With no word more ; neither durst Olaf stay  
His swift departing, doubting of his mood ;  
For though indeed the word he spake was good,  
Yet some vague fear he seemed to leave behind,  
And Olaf scarce durst seek, lest he should find  
Some ill thing lurking by his glory’s side.  
But after Guest his son and men did ride,  
And forth to Thickwood with no stay they went.  
But now, the journey and the day nigh spent,  
Unto his father as they rode turned Thord,  
With mind to say to him some common word,  
But stared astonished, for the great tears ran  
Over the wrinkled cheeks of the old man,  
Yea, and adown his beard, nor shame had he  
That Thord in such a plight his face should see  
At last he spake :

“Thou wonderest, O my son,  
To see the tears fall down from such an one  
As I am—folly is it in good sooth  
Bewraying inward grief ; but pain and ruth

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Work in me so, I may not hold my peace  
About the woes, that as thy years increase  
Thou shalt behold fall on the country-side—  
—But me the grey cairn ere that day shall hide—  
Fair men and women have I seen to-day,  
Yet I weep not because these pass away,  
Sad though that is, but rather weep for this,  
That they know not upon their day of bliss  
How their worn hearts shall fail them ere they die,  
How sore the weight of woe on them shall lie,  
Which no sigh eases, wherewithal no hope,  
No pride, no rage, shall make them fit to cope.  
Remember what folk thou this day hast seen,  
And in what joyous steads thy feet have been,  
Then think of this!—that men may look to see  
Love slaying love, and ruinous victory,  
And truth called lies, and kindness turned to hate  
And prudence sowing seeds of all debate!  
Son, thou shalt live to hear when I am dead  
Of Bodli standing over Kiartan's head,  
His friend, his foster-brother, and his bane,  
That he in turn e'en such an end may gain.  
Woe worth the while! forget it, and be blind!  
Look not before thee! the road left behind,  
Let that be to thee as a tale well told  
To make thee merry when thou growest old!"

So spake he; but by this time had they come  
Unto the wood that lay round Armod's home,  
So on the tree-beset and narrow way  
They entered now, and left behind the day;

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And whatso things henceforth to Guest befell,  
No more of him the story hath to tell.

*Gudrun twice Wedded, Widowed, and Wooed  
of Kiartan.*

SO wore the time away, nor long it was  
Ere somewhat of Guest's forecast came to pass.  
Drawn by her beauty, Thorvald wooed Gudrun ;  
Saying withal that he was such an one  
As fainer was to wed a wife than lands,  
Readier by far to give forth from his hands  
That which he had, than take aught of her kin.  
And in such wise he did not fail to win  
His fond desire, and, therewith, wretched life.  
For she who deemed nought worth so much of strife  
As to say 'no' for ever, being wed, found  
How the chain galled whereto she now was bound,  
And more and more began to look on him  
With hate that would be scorn, with eyes grown dim  
With hope of change that came not, and lips set  
For ever with the stifling of regret.  
Coarse Thorvald was, and rough and passionate,  
And little used on change of days to wait ;  
And as she ever gloomed before his eyes,  
Rage took the place of the first grieved surprise,  
Wherewith he found that he who needs must love  
Could get no love in turn, nay, nor e'en move  
Her heart to kindness : then as nothing strange

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Still with sad loathing looks she took the change  
She noted in him, as if all were done  
Between them, and no deed beneath the sun  
That he could do would now be worse to her.

Judge if the hot heart of the man could bear  
Such days as these ! Upon a time it fell  
That he, most fain indeed to love her well,  
Would she but turn to him, had striven sore  
To gain her love, and yet gat nothing more  
Than a faint smile of scorn, 'neath eyes whose gaze  
Seemed fixed for ever on the hoped-for days,  
Wherein he no more should have part or lot ;  
Then mingled hate with love in him, and hot  
His heart grew past all bearing ; round about  
He stared, as one who hears the eager shout  
Of closing foes, when he to death is brought ;  
In his fierce heart thought crowded upon thought,  
Till he saw not and heard not, but rose up  
And cast upon the floor his half-filled cup,  
And crying out, smote her upon the face ;  
Then strode adown the hushed and crowded place,  
For meal-time was it, till he reached the door ;  
Then gat his horse, and over hill and moor,  
Scarce knowing where he went, rode furiously.

But in the hall, folk turned them round to see  
What thing Gudrun would do, who for a while  
Sat pale and silent, with a deadly smile  
Upon her lips ; then called to where she sat  
Folk from the hall, and talked of this and that  
Gaily, as one who hath no care or pain :

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Yea, when the goodman gat him back again  
She met him changed, so that he well-nigh thought  
That better days his hasty blow had brought.  
And still as time wore on, day after day  
Wondering, he saw her seeming blithe and gay ;  
So he, though sore misdoubting him of this,  
Took what he might of pleasure and of bliss,  
And put thought back. So time wore till the spring,  
And then the goodman rode unto the Thing,  
Not over light of heart, or free from fear,  
Though his wife's face at parting was all clear  
Of frown or sullenness ; but he being gone,  
Next morn Gudrun rode with one man alone  
Forth unto Bathstead ; there her tale she told,  
And as in those days law strained not to hold  
Folk whom love held not, or some common tie,  
So her divorce was set forth speedily,  
For mighty were her kin.

And now once more  
At Bathstead did she dwell, free as before,  
And, smiling, heard of how her husband fared  
When by the Hill of Laws he stood and heard  
The words, that he belike half thought to hear,  
Which took from him a thing once held so dear  
That all was nought thereby.

Now wise ones tell  
That there was one who used to note her well  
Within her husband's hall, and many say  
That talk of love they had before the day  
That she went back to Bathstead ; how that was  
I know not surely ; but it came to pass

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

That scarcely had abated the first rage  
Of her old mate, and scarce less like a cage  
Of red-hot iron 'gan to feel his life,  
Ere this man, Thord, had won Gudrun to wife ;  
So, since the man was brisk and brave and fair,  
And she had known him when her days were drear,  
And turned with hope and longing to his eyes,  
Kind amid hard things, in most joyous wise  
Their life went, and she deemed she loved him well ;  
And the strange things that Guest did once foretell,  
Which morn and noon and eve she used to set  
Before her eyes, she now would fain forget.  
Alas ! forgotten or remembered, still  
Midst joy or sorrow fate shall work its will ;  
Three months they lived in joy and peace enow,  
Till on a June night did the south-west blow  
The rainy rack o'er Gudrun's sleeping head,  
While in the firth was rolled her husband dead  
Toward the black cliffs ; drowned was he, says my tale,  
By wizard's spells amidst a summer gale.

Then back to Bathstead Gudrun came again, :  
To sit with fierce heart brooding o'er her pain,  
While life and time seemed made to torture her,  
That she the utmost of all pain might bear,  
To please she knew not whom ; and yet mid this,  
And all her raging for the vanished bliss,  
Would Guest's words float up to her memory,  
And quicken cold life ; then would she cast by  
As something vile the comfort that they brought,  
Yet, none the less, still stronger grew that thought,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Unheeded, and unchidden therefore, round  
The weary wall of woe, her life that bound.

So wore the months ; spring with its longings came,  
And now in every mouth was Kiartan's name,  
And daily now must Gudrun's dull ears bear  
Tales of the prowess of his youth to hear,  
While in his cairn forgotten lay her love.  
For this man, said they, all men's hearts did move,  
Nor yet might envy cling to such an one,  
So far beyond all dwellers 'neath the sun ;  
Great was he, yet so fair of face and limb  
That all folk wondered much, beholding him,  
How such a man could be ; no fear he knew,  
And all in manly deeds he could outdo ;  
Fleet-foot, a swimmer strong, an archer good,  
Keen-eyed to know the dark waves' changing mood ;  
Sure on the crag, and with the sword so skilled,  
That when he played therewith the air seemed filled  
With light of gleaming blades ; therewith was he  
Of noble speech, though says not certainly  
My tale, that aught of his be left behind  
With rhyme and measure deftly intertwined ;  
Well skilled was he, too, in the craftsman's lore  
To deal with iron mid the stithy's roar,  
And many a sword-blade knew his heavy hand.  
Shortly, if he amid ten kings should stand,  
All men would think him worthier man than they ;  
And yet withal it was his daily way  
To be most gentle both of word and deed,  
And ever folk would seek him in their need,  
Nor was there any child but loved him well.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Such things about him ever would men tell,  
Until their hearts swelled in them as they thought  
How great a glory to their land was brought,  
Seeing that this man was theirs. Such love and praise  
Kiartan's beginning had in those fair days,  
While Gudrun sat sick-eyed, and hearkened this,  
Still brooding on the late-passed days of bliss,  
And thinking still how worthless such things were.

But now when midsummer was drawing near,  
As on an eve folk sat within the hall,  
Man unto man far off did they hear call,  
And then the sound of horse-hoofs; Oswif rose,  
And went into the porch to look for those  
Who might be coming, and at last folk heard,  
Close to the porch, the new-come travellers' word,  
And turned to meet them; Gudrun sat alone  
High on the daïs when all folk were gone,  
And playing with her golden finger-rings,  
Set all her heart to think of bygone things,  
Till hateful seemed all hopes, all thoughts of men.

Yet did she turn unto their voices, when  
Folk back again into the hall did crowd,  
Torch-litten now, laughing and talking loud,  
Then as the guests adown the long hall drew  
Olaf the Peacock presently she knew,  
Hand in hand with her father; but behind  
Came two young men; then rose up to her mind,  
Against her will, the tales of Kiartan told,  
Because she deemed the one, whose hair of gold  
In the new torch-light gleamed, was even he,



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And that the black-haired high-browed one must be  
Bodli, the son of Thorleik ; but with that  
Up to the place where listlessly she sat,  
They came, and on her feet she now must stand  
To welcome them ; then Olaf took her hand,  
And looked on her with eyes compassionate,  
And said :

“ O Gudrun, ill has been thy fate,  
But surely better days shall soon be thine,  
For not for nought do eyes like thine eyes shine  
Upon the hard world ; thou shalt bless us yet  
In many a wise and all thy woes forget.”

She answered nought, but drew her hand away,  
And heavier yet the weight upon her lay  
That thus men spake of her. . But, turning round,  
Kiartan upon the other hand she found,  
Gazing upon her with wild hungry eyes  
And parted lips ; then did strange joy surprise  
Her listless heart, and changed her old world was ;  
Ere she had time to think, all woe did pass  
Away from her, and all her life grew sweet,  
And scarce she felt the ground beneath her feet,  
Or knew who stood around, or in what place  
Of heaven or earth she was ; soft grew her face ;  
In tears that fell not yet, her eyes did swim,  
As, trembling, she reached forth her hand to him,  
And with the shame of love her smooth cheeks burned,  
And her lips quivered, as if sore they yearned  
For words they had not learned, and might not know  
Till night and loneliness their form should show.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But Kiartan's face a happy smile did light,  
Kind, loving, confident; good hap and might  
Seemed in his voice as now he spake, and said :

“They say the dead for thee will ne'er be dead,  
And on this eve I thought in sooth to have  
Labour enow to draw thee from the grave  
Of the old days; but thou rememberest,  
Belike, days earlier yet, that men call best  
Of all days, when as younglings erst we met.  
Thou thinkest now thou never didst forget  
This face of mine, since now most certainly  
The eyes are kind wherewith thou lookst on me.”

A shade came o'er her face, but quickly passed.  
“Yea,” said she, “if such pleasant days might last,  
As when we wandered laughing hand in hand  
Along the borders of the shell-strewn strand.”

She wondered at the sound of her own voice,  
She chid her heart that it must needs rejoice,  
She marvelled why her soul with fear was filled;  
But quickly every questioning was stilled  
As he sat down by her.

Old Oswif smiled  
To see her sorrow in such wise beguiled,  
And Olaf laughed for joy, and many a thought  
Of happy loves to Bodli's heart was brought  
As by his friend he sat, and saw his face  
So bright with bliss; and all the merry place  
Ran over with goodwill that sight to see,  
And the hours passed in great festivity.

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

At last beneath the glimmer of the moon,  
Fanned by the soft sea-wind that tempers June,  
Homeward they rode, sire, son and foster-son,  
Kiartan half joyful that the eve was done,  
And he had leisure for himself to weave  
Tales of the joyful way that from that eve  
Should lead to perfect bliss ; Bodli no less  
Rejoicing in his fellow's happiness,  
Dreaming of such-like joy to come to him,  
And Olaf, thinking how that nowise dim  
The glory of his line through these should grow.

But while in peace these through the night did go,  
Vexed by new thoughts and old thoughts, Gudrun lay  
Upon her bed : she watched him go away,  
And her heart sank within her, and there came,  
With pain of that departing, pity and shame,  
That struggling with her love yet made it strong,  
That called her longing blind, yet made her long  
Yet more for more desire, what seeds soe'er  
Of sorrow, hate and ill were hidden there.  
So with her strong heart wrestled love, till she  
Sank 'neath the hand of sleep, and quietly  
Beneath the new-risen sun she lay at rest,  
The bed-gear fallen away from her white breast,  
One arm deep buried in her hair, one spread  
Abroad, across the 'broideries of the bed,  
A smile upon her lips, and yet a tear,  
Scarce dry, but stayed anigh her dainty ear—  
How fair, how soft, how kind she seemed that morn,  
Ere she anew to love and life was born.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

A little space to part these twain indeed  
Was seven short miles of hill and moor and mead,  
And soon the threshold of the Bathstead hall  
Knew nigh as much of Kiartan's firm footfall  
As of the sweep of Gudrun's kirtle-hem,  
And sweet past words to tell life grew to them ;  
Sweet the awaking in the morn, when lay  
Below the hall the narrow winding way,  
The friend that led, the foe that kept apart ;  
And sweet the joyful flutter of the heart  
Anigh the door, ere clinging memory  
Gave place to rapturous sight, and eye met eye ;  
Sweet the long hours of converse when each word  
Like fairest music still seemed doubly heard,  
Caught by the ear and clung to by the heart ;  
Yea, even most sweet the minute they must part,  
Because the veil, that so oft time must draw  
Before them, fell, and clear without a flaw,  
Their hearts saw love, that moment they did stand  
Ere lip left lip, or hand fell down from hand ;  
Yea, that passed o'er, still sweet and bitter-sweet  
The yearning pain that stayed the lingering feet  
Upon the threshold, and the homeward way ;  
And silent chamber covered up from day  
For thoughts of words unsaid—ah, sweet the night  
Amidst its dreams of manifold delight !

And yet sometimes pangs of perplexéd pain  
Would torture Gudrun, as she thought again  
On Guest and his forecasting of her dream ;  
And through the dark of days to come would gleam

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Fear, like a flame of hell shot suddenly  
Up through spring meadows 'twixt fair tree and tree,  
Though little might she see the flaws, whereof  
That past dream warned her, midst her dream of love ;  
And whatso things her eyes refused to see,  
Made wise by fear, none others certainly  
Might see in love so seeming smooth as this,  
That looked to all men like the door of bliss  
Unto the twain, and to the country-side  
Good hope and joy, that thus so fast were tied  
The bonds 'twixt two such houses as were these,  
And folk before them saw long years of peace.

Of Bodli Thorleikson the story says,  
That he, o'ershadowed still by Kiartan's praise,  
Was second but to him ; although, indeed,  
He, who perchance the love of men did need  
More than his fellow, less their hearts might move ;  
Yet fair to all men seemed the trust and love  
Between the friends, and fairer unto none  
Than unto Olaf, who scarce loved his son  
More than his brother's son ; now seemed it too,  
That this new love closer the kinsmen drew  
Than e'en before, and whatso either did  
The other knew, and scarce their thoughts seemed hid  
One from the other.

So as day by day  
Went Kiartan unto Bathstead, still the way  
Seemed shorter if his friend beside him rode ;  
Then might he ease his soul of that great load  
Of love unsatisfied, by words, and take

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Mockeries in turn, grown sweet for that name's sake  
They wrapped about, or glow with joy to hear  
The praises of the heart he held so dear,  
And laugh with joy and pleasure of his life,  
To note how Bodli's heart withal seemed rife  
With love that his love kindled, though as yet  
It wandered, on no heart of woman set.  
So Bodli, nothing loth, went many a day,  
Whenso they would, to make the lovers gay,  
Whenso they would, to get him gone, that these  
E'en with such yearning words their souls might please  
As must be spoken, but sound folly still  
To aught but twain, because no tongue hath skill  
To tell their meaning: kinder, Kiartan deemed,  
Grew Bodli day by day, and ever seemed  
Well-nigh as happy as the loving twain,  
And unto Bodli life seemed nought but gain,  
And fair the days were.

On a day it fell  
As the three talked, they 'gan in sport to tell  
The names o'er of such women good and fair,  
As in the land that tide unwedded were,  
Naming a mate for Bodli, and still he  
Must laugh and shake his head;  
"Then over sea,"  
Quoth Kiartan, "mayhap such an one there is  
That thou mayst deem the getting of her bliss;  
Go forth and win her with the rover's sword!"

Then Bodli laughed, and cast upon the board  
The great grey blade and ponderous iron hilt,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

All unadorned, the yoke-fellow of guilt,  
And said, "Go, sword, and fetch me home a bride!  
But here in Iceland have I will to bide  
With those that love me, till the fair days change."

Then Gudrun said, "Things have there been more  
    strange,  
Than that we three should sit above the oars,  
The while on even keel 'twixt the low shores  
Our long-ship breasts the Thames flood, or the Seine.  
Methinks in biding here is little gain,  
Cooped up in this cold corner of the world."

Then up sprang Kiartan, seized the sword, and hurled  
Its weight aloft, and caught it by the hilt  
As down it fell, and cried, "Would that the tilt  
Were even now being rigged above the ship!  
Would that we stood to see the oars first dip  
In the green waves! nay, rather would that we  
Above the bulwarks now saw Italy,  
With all its beacons flaring! Sheathe thy sword,  
Fair foster-brother, till I say the word  
That draws it forth; and, Gudrun, never fear  
That thou a word or twain of me shalt hear,  
E'en if the birds must bear them o'er the sea."

Her eyes were fixed upon him lovingly  
As thus he spake, and Bodli smiling saw  
Her hand to Kiartan's ever nigher draw;  
Then he rose up and sheathed the sword, and said,  
"Nay, rather if I be so hard to wed,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

I yet must think of roving, so I go  
To talk to Oswif, all the truth to know  
About the news the chapmen carried here,  
That Olaf Tryggvison his sword doth rear  
'Gainst Hacon and his fortune."

Therewithal

He laughed, and gat him swiftly from the hall,  
And found the old man, nor came back again  
Until through sun and shadow had the twain  
Sat long together, and the hall 'gan fill.  
Then did he deem his friend sat somewhat still,  
And something strange he saw in Gudrun's eyes  
As she gazed on him ; nor did fail to rise  
In his own heart the shadow of a shade,  
That made him deem the world less nobly made,  
And yet was like to pleasure. On the way  
Back home again, not much did Kiartan say,  
And what he spake was well-nigh mockery  
Of speech, wherewith he had been wont to free  
His heart from longings grown too sweet to bear.  
But time went on, and still the days did wear  
With little seeming change ; if love grew cold  
In Kiartan's heart one day, the next o'er bold,  
O'er frank, he noted not who might be by,  
When he unto his love was drawing nigh ;  
Gudrun gloomed not ; as merry as before  
Did Bodli come and go 'twixt dais and door.  
Only perchance a little oftener they  
Fell upon talk of the fair lands that lay  
Across the seas, and sometimes would a look  
Cross Gudrun's face that seemed a half rebuke



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

To Kiartan, as all over-eagerly  
He talked about the life beyond the sea,  
As thereof he had heard the stories tell.  
Then Bodli sometimes into musings fell,  
So dreamlike, that he might not tell his thought  
When he again to common life was brought.

So passed the seasons, but in autumn-tide  
The foster-brothers did to Burgfirth ride,  
Unto a ship new come to White-river ;  
Talk with the outland chapmen had they there,  
And Kiartan bade the captain in the end  
Back unto Herdholt as his guest to wend,—  
And nothing loth he went with him ; and now  
Great tidings thereupon began to show  
Of Hacon slain, his son thrust from the land,  
And Norway in fair peace beneath the hand  
Of Olaf Tryggvison ; nor did he fail  
To tell about the king full many a tale,  
And praise him for the noblest man, that e'er  
Had held the tiller, or cast forth the spear :  
And Kiartan listened eagerly, yet seemed  
As if amid the tale he well-nigh dreamed ;  
And now withal, when he to Bathstead went,  
Less than before would talk of his intent  
To see the outlands, to his listening love ;  
And when at whiles she spake to him thereof  
Lightly he answered her, and smile or kiss  
Would change their talk to idle words of bliss :  
Less of her too to Bodli now he spake,  
Although this other, (for her beauty's sake

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

He told himself) to hear of her was fain ;  
And he, for his part, sometimes felt a pain,  
As though the times were changing over fast,  
When Kiartan let the word of his go past  
Unnoted, that in other days belike  
Had nowise failed from out his heart to strike  
The sparks of lovesome praise.

But now Yule-tide  
Was come at last, and folk from far and wide  
Went to their neighbours' feasts, and as wont was  
All Bathstead unto Herdholt hall did pass,  
And the feast lasted long, and all folk gat  
Things that their souls desired, and Gudrun sat  
In the high-seat beside the goodwife there.

But ever now her wary ears did hear  
The new king's name bandied from mouth to mouth,  
And talk of those new-comers from the south ;  
And through her anxious heart a sharp pain smote  
As Kiartan's face she eagerly 'gan note  
And sighed ; because, leaned forward on the board,  
He sat, with eager face hearkening each word,  
Nor speaking aught ; then long with hungry eyes  
She sat regarding him, nor yet would rise  
A word unto her lips : and all the while  
Bodli gazed on them with a fading smile  
About his lips, and eyes that ever grew  
More troubled still, until he hardly knew  
What folk were round about.

So passed away  
Yule-tide at Herdholt, cold day following day,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Till spring was gone, and Gudrun had not failed  
To win both many days where joy prevailed,  
And many a pang of fear; till so it fell  
That in the summer, whereof now we tell,  
Upon a day in blithe mood Kiartan came  
To Bathstead, not as one who looks for blame,  
And Bodli with him, sad-eyed, silent, dull,  
Noted of Gudrun, who no less was full  
Of merry talk, yea, more than her wont was.  
But as the hours toward eventide did pass,  
Said Kiartan :

“ Love, make we the most of bliss,  
For though, indeed, not the last day this is  
Whereon we twain shall meet in such a wise,  
Yet shalt thou see me soon in fighting guise,  
And hear the horns blow up our *Loth to go*,  
For in White-river—”

“ Is it even so,”

She broke in, “ that these feet abide behind ?  
Men call me hard, but thou hast known me kind ;  
Men call me fair, my body give I thee ;  
Men call me dainty, let the rough salt sea  
Deal with me as it will, so thou be near !  
Let me share glory with thee, and take fear  
That thy heart throws aside ! ”

Hand joined to hand,  
As one who prays, and trembling, did she stand  
With parted lips, and pale and weary-faced.  
But up and down the hall-floor Bodli paced  
With clanking sword, and brows set in a frown,  
And scarce less pale than she. The sun low down

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Shone through the narrow windows of the hall,  
And on the gold upon her breast did fall,  
And gilt her slim clasped hands.

There Kiartan stood  
Gazing upon her in strange wavering mood,  
Now longing sore to clasp her to his heart,  
And pray her, too, that they might ne'er depart,  
Now well-nigh ready to say such a word  
As cutteth love across as with a sword ;  
So fought love in him with the craving vain  
The love of all the wondering world to gain,  
Though such he named it not. And so at last  
His eyes upon the pavement did he cast,  
And knit his brow as though some word to say ;  
Then fell her outstretched hands, she cried :

“Nay, nay !

Thou need'st not speak, I will not ask thee twice  
To take a gift, a good gift, and be wise ;  
I know my heart, thou know'st it not ; farewell,  
Maybe that other tales the Skalds shall tell  
Than of thy great deeds.”

Still her face was pale,  
As with a sound betwixt a sigh and wail,  
She brushed by Bodli, who, aghast, did stand  
With open mouth, and vainly stretched-out hand ;  
But Kiartan followed her a step or two,  
Then stayed, bewildered by his sudden woe ;  
But even therewith, as nigh the door she was,  
She turned back suddenly, and straight did pass,  
Trembling all over, to his side, and said,  
With streaming eyes :

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

“Let not my words be weighed  
As a man’s words are! O, fair love, go forth  
And come thou back again, made no more worth  
Unto this heart; but worthier it may be  
To the dull world thy worth that cannot see.  
Go forth, and let the rumour of thee run  
Through every land that is beneath the sun;  
For know I not, indeed, that everything  
Thou winnest at the hands of lord or king,  
Is surely mine, as thou art mine at last?”

Then round about his neck her arms she cast,  
And wept right sore, and touched with love and shame,  
Must Kiartan offer to leave hope of fame,  
And noble life; but midst her tears she smiled,  
“Go forth, my love, and be thou not beguiled  
By woman’s tears, I spake but as a fool,  
We of the north wrap not our men in wool,  
Lest they should die at last; nay, be not moved,  
To think that thou a faint-heart fool hast loved!”

For now his tears fell too, he said: “My sweet,  
Ere the ship sails we yet again shall meet  
To say farewell, a little while, and then,  
When I come back to hold my place mid men,  
With honour won for thee—how fair it is  
To think on now, the sweetness and the bliss!”

Some little words she said no pen could write,  
Upon his face she laid her fingers white,  
And, midst of kisses, with his hair did play;

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then, smiling through her tears, she went away,  
Nor heeded Bodli aught—

—Men say the twain,

Kiartan and Gudrun, never met again  
In loving wise ; that each to each no more  
Their eyes looked kind on this side death's dark shore,  
That midst their tangled life they must forget,  
Till they were dead, that e'er their lips had met.

For ere the day that Kiartan meant to come  
And kiss his love once more within her home,  
The south-east wind, that had stayed hitherto  
Their sailing, changed, and northwest now it blew :  
And Kálf, the captain, urged them to set forth,  
Because that tide the wind loved not the north,  
And now the year grew late for long delay.  
Night was it when he spake ; at dawn next day,  
Before the door at Herdholt might men see,  
Armed, and in saddle, a goodly company.  
Kiartan, bright-eyed and flushed, restless withal,  
As on familiar things his eyes did fall,  
Yet eager to be gone, and smiling still,  
For pride and hope and love his soul did fill,  
As of his coming life he thought, and saw  
In all the days that were to be, no flaw.  
About him were his fellows, ten such men  
As in the land had got no equals then ;  
By him his foster-brother sat, as true  
As was the steel the rover's hand erst drew ;  
There stood his father, flushed with joy and pride,  
By the fair-carven door that did abide,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Till he fulfilled of glory came again  
To take his bride before the eyes of men.

Now skipper Kálf, clad in the Peacock's gift,  
Unto the south his gold-wrought spear did lift,  
And Kiartan stooped and kissed his sire. A shout  
Rose from the home-men, as they turned about,  
And trotted jingling down the grassy knoll.  
Silent awhile rode Kiartan, till his soul,  
Filled with a many thoughts, in speech o'erflowed,  
And unto Bodli, who beside him rode,  
He fell to talk of all that they should do  
In the fair countries that they journeyed to.  
Not Norway only, or the western lands,  
In time to come, he said, might know their hands,  
But fairer places, folk of greater fame,  
Where 'neath the shadow of the Roman name  
Sat the Greek king, gold-clad, with bloodless sword.  
But as he spoke Bodli said here a word  
And there a word, and knew not what he said,  
Nay, scarcely knew what wild thoughts filled his head,  
What longings burned, like a still quickening flame,  
Within his sad heart.

So that night they came  
To Burgfirth and the place upon the strand  
Where by the ready ship the tents did stand,  
And there they made good cheer, and slept that night,  
But on the morrow, with the earliest light,  
They gat a ship-board, and, all things being done,  
Upon a day when low clouds hid the sun,  
And 'neath the harsh north-west down drave the rain,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

They drew the gangway to the ship again,  
And ran the oars out. There did Kiartan stand  
By Kálf, who took the tiller in his hand  
And conned the rising bows ; but when at last  
Toward the grey sky the wet oar-blades were cast,  
And space 'twixt stern and land 'gan widen now,  
Kiartan cried out and ran forth to the prow,  
While rope and block yet beat confusedly,  
And shook his drawn sword o'er the dark grey sea :  
And step for step behind him Bodli went,  
And on his sword-hilt, with a like intent,  
He laid his hand, and half drew from its sheath  
The rover's sword ; then with a deep-drawn breath,  
Most like a sigh, he thrust it back again,  
His face seemed sharpened with a sudden pain.  
He turned him round the driving scud to face,  
His breast heaved, and he staggered in his place,  
And stretched his strong arms forth with a low moan  
Unto the hidden hills, 'neath which alone  
Sat Gudrun—sat his love—and therewithal  
Down did the bows into the black trough fall,  
Up rose the oar-song, through the waters grey,  
Unto the south the good ship took her way.

### *The Dealings of King Olaf Tryggvison with the Icelanders*

NOW tells the tale that safe to Drontheim came  
Kiartan with all his folk, and the great fame  
Of Olaf Tryggvison then first they knew,



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

When thereof spake the townsmen to the crew,  
But therewithal yet other news they heard,  
Which seemed to one and all a heavy word ;  
How that the king, from the old customs turned,  
Now with such zeal toward his new faith burned,  
That thereby nothing else to him was good  
But that all folk should bow before the Rood.  
When Kiartan's coming thitherward betid  
Three ships of Iceland lay there in the Nid,  
Manned by stout men enow ; downcast were these  
Who had been glad enow the king to please ;  
And save their goods, and lives, perchance, withal,  
But knew not how their forefathers to call  
Souls damned for ever and ever ; yet they said  
That matters drew so swiftly to a head,  
That when they met the king he passed them by  
With head turned round, or else with threatening eye  
Scowled on them ; " And when Yule-tide comes,"  
said they,  
" We look to have from him a settled day  
When we must change our faith or bide the worst."

" Well," Kiartan said, " this king is not the first  
To think the world is made for him alone ;  
Who knows how things will go ere all is done ?  
God wot, I wish my will done even as he ;  
I hate him not."

And therewith merrily  
From out the ship the men of Herdholt went ;  
A bright eve was it, and the good town sent  
Thin smoke and blue straight upward through the air,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For it had rained of late, and here and there  
Sauntered the townsfolk, man and maid and child ;  
Where street met quay a fiddle's sound beguiled  
A knot of listening folk, who no less turned  
And stared hard as the westering sunbeams burned  
Upon the steel and scarlet of that band,  
Whom, as ye well may wot, no niggard hand  
Had furnished forth ; so up the long street then,  
Gazing about, well gazed at, went the men,  
A goodly sight. But e'en as they would wend  
About the corner where that street had end,  
High up in air near by 'gan ring a chime  
Whose sweetness seemed to bless e'en that sweet time  
With double blessing. Kiartan stayed his folk  
When first above his head that sound outbroke,  
And listened smiling, till he heard a sigh  
Close by him, and met Bodli's wandering eye  
That fell before his.

Softly Kiartan spake :

“Now would Gudrun were here e'en for the sake  
Of this sweet sound ! nought have I heard so sweet.”

So on they passed, and turned about the street,  
And saw the great church cast its shadow down  
Upon the low roofs of the goodly town,  
And yet awhile they stayed there marvelling ;  
But therewith heard behind them armour ring,  
And turning, saw a gallant company  
Going afoot, and yet most brave to see,  
Come toward the church, and nigher as they drew  
It was to Kiartan even as if he knew  
One man among them, taller by the head

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Than any there, and clad in kirtle red,  
Girt with a sword, with whose gold hilt he played  
With his left hand, the while his right did shade  
His eyes from the bright sun that 'gainst him blazed,  
As on the band of Icelanders he gazed ;  
Broad-shouldered was he, grand to look upon,  
And in his red beard tangled was the sun  
That lit his bright face up in wrathful wise,  
That fiercer showed his light-grey eager eyes.  
Now ere he came quite close, sidelong he bent  
Unto a man who close beside him went,  
Then turned, and gazed at Kiartan harder yet,  
As he passed by, and therewith their eyes met,  
And Kiartan's heart beat, and his face grew bright,  
His eyes intent as if amidst a fight,  
Yet on his lips a smile was, confident,  
Devoid of hate, as by him the man went.  
But Bodli said, "Let us begone ere day  
Is fully passed, if even yet we may ;  
This is the king, and what then may we do  
'Gainst such a man, a feeble folk and few?"

But Kiartan turned upon him loftily,  
And said, "Abide ! I do not look to die  
Ere we get back to Iceland ; one there is,  
Thou knowst, therein, to hold through woe and bliss  
My soul from its departing ; go we then  
And note the way of worship of these men."

So on that eve about the church they hung,  
And through the open door heard fair things sung,  
And sniffed the incense ; then to ship they went.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But the next morn the king to Kiartan sent  
To bid him come unto the royal hall,  
Where nought but good to him and his should fall ;  
Close by the ship upon the sunny quay  
Was Kiartan, when the man these words did say,  
Amidst a ring of Icelanders, who sat  
Upon the bales of unshipped goods : with that  
Kiartan stood up and said unto the man :

“Undo thy kirtle if thy worn hands can !  
Show us thy neck where the king’s chain has galled ;  
But tell us not whereby thy sire was called  
Lest some of these should blush—go tell the king  
That I left Iceland for another thing  
Than to curse all the dead men of my race,  
To make him merry—lengthen not thy face,  
For thou shalt tell him therewithal, that I  
Will do him service well and faithfully  
As a free man may do ; else let him take  
What he can get of me for his God’s sake.”

Silence there was about him at this word,  
Except that Bodli muttered in his beard :  
“Now certainly a good reward we have,  
In that we cast away what fortune gave,  
Yet doubtless shall our names be bruited far  
When we are dead—then, too, no longings are  
For what we may not have.”

So as he came  
The man went, and e’en Kiartan now had blame  
For his rash word. “What will ye, friends ?” he said,  
“The king is wise ; his wrath will well be weighed ;

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

He knoweth that we shall not fall for nought.  
Should I speak soft?—why then should we be brought,  
Unarmed belike, and helpless, one by one  
Up to the bishop when the feast was done—  
What, Kálf! thou say'st, aboard, and let us weigh?  
Yes, and be overhauled ere end of day  
By the king's longships—nay, friends, all is well;  
And at the worst shall be a tale to tell  
Ere all is o'er.”

They hearkened, and cast fear  
Aside awhile; for death had need be near  
Unto such men for them to heed him aught.

So the time passed, and the king harmed them nought  
And sent no message more to them, and they  
Were lodged within the town, and day by day  
Went here and there in peace, till Yule drew nigh.  
And now folk said the feast would not pass by  
Without some troubling of the ancient faith  
At the king's hands, and war and ugly death  
Drew round the season of the peace on earth  
The angels sang of at that blessed birth.  
But whoso gloomed at tidings men might show,  
It was not Kiartan; wary was he though,  
And weighed men's speech well; and upon a day  
He, casting up what this and that might say,  
All Iceland folk into one place did call,  
And when they were assembled in the hall,  
Spake on this wise:

“Fair fellows, well ye know  
The saw that says, *The wise saves blow by blow*;

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

This king who lies so heavy on us here  
Is a great man ; his own folk hold him dear,  
For he spares nought to them. Yet ye know well  
That when his might on Hacon's fortune fell,  
Great foes he left alive, and still they live.  
Noble the man is ; but yet who can give  
Good fortune to his foe ? and he must be,  
Despite our goodwill, still our enemy.  
I grudge it not, for noble seems the chance  
The fortunes of a fair name to advance.  
And so it may be, friends, that we shall free  
The land this tide of the long tyranny  
That Harald Fair-hair laid on it, and give  
Unto all folk beneath just laws to live,  
As in the old days—shortly let us go,  
When time shall serve, and to king Olaf show  
That death breeds death ; I say not this same night,  
But hold ye ever ready for the fight,  
And shun the mead-horn : Yule is close anigh  
And the king's folk will drink abundantly ;  
Then light the torch and draw the whetted sword !—  
—A great man certes—yet I marked this word  
Said by his bishop—many words he made  
About a matter small if rightly weighed—  
*To die is gain*—this king and I, and ye  
Are young for that, yet so it well may be :  
Some of us here are deemed to have done well  
How shall it be when folk our story tell  
If we die grey-haired ? honour fallen away,  
Good faith lost, kindness perished—for a day  
Of little pleasure mingled with great pain—

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

So will we not unto the Gods complain  
Or draw our mouths awry with foolish hate,  
This king and I, if 'neath the hand of fate  
Sword to sword yet we meet: hearken once more—  
It seems the master of this new-found lore  
Said to his men once, *Think ye that I bring  
Peace upon earth? nay, but a sword—*O king,  
Behold the sword ready to meet thy sword!"

Out sprang his bright steel at that latest word,  
And bright the weapons glittered round about,  
And the roof shook again beneath their shout;  
But only Bodli, silent, pensive, stood,  
As though he heeded nought of bad or good  
In word or deed. But Kiartan, flushed and glad,  
Noted him not, for whatso thought he had,  
He deemed him ever ready in the end  
To follow after as himself should wend.  
Howso that was, now were these men at one,  
That e'en as Kiartan bade it should be done,  
And the king set on, ere on them he fell;  
So then to meat they gat and feasted well;  
But the next morn espial should be made  
How best to do the thing that Kiartan bade.

The next morn came, and other news withal,  
For by a messenger the king did call  
The Icelanders to council in his house,  
Bidding them note, that howso valorous  
They might be, still but little doubt there was  
That lightly he might bring their end to pass

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

If need should drive him thereto. "Yet," said he,  
"Fain would I give you peace, though certainly  
This tide but one of two things must ye choose,  
Either nought else but life itself to lose,  
Or else to come and hearken to my words  
In the great hall whereas I see my lords."

Kiartan gazed round about when this was said,  
Smiling beneath a frown, his face flushed red  
With wrath and shame. "Well," said he, "we are  
caught—  
The sluggards' counsel morning brings to nought.  
What say ye, shall we hold the feast at home?  
Hearken, the guests get ready! shall they come?"

For as he spake upon the wind was borne  
Unto their ears the blast of a great horn,  
And smiled the messenger, and therewithal  
Down from the minster roar of bells did fall,  
Rung back and clashing; thereon Bodli spake:

"Thou and I, cousin, for our honour's sake,  
May be content to die; but what of these?  
Thy part it is to bring us unto peace  
If it may be; then, if the worst befall,  
There can we die too, as in Atli's Hall  
The Niblungs fell; nor worser will it sound  
That thus it was, when we are underground,  
And over there our Gudrun hears the tale."

Silent sat Kiartan, gazing on the pale  
Set face of Bodli for a while, then turned



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Unto his silent folk, and saw they yearned  
For one chance more of life.

“Go, man,” he said,  
“And tell thy king his will shall be obeyed  
So far as this, that we will come to him ;  
But bid him guard with steel, head, breast, and limb,  
Since as we come, belike, we shall not go,  
And who the end of words begun can know ?  
Ho, friends ! do on your war-gear ! Fear ye not,  
Since two good things to choose from have ye got :  
Peace, or a famed death !”

Then with both his ears  
Ringing with clink of mail and clash of spears  
The messenger went forth upon his way ;  
And the king knew by spies, the wise ones say,  
What counsel Kiartan gave his folk that eve,  
And had no will in such great hands to leave  
His chance of life or death. Now, armed at last,  
The men of Iceland up the long street passed,  
And saw few men there ; wives and children stood  
Before the doors to gaze, or in his hood  
An elder muttered, as they passed him by,  
Or sad-eyed maids looked on them longingly.  
So came they to the great hall of the king,  
And round about the door there stood a ring  
Of tall men armed, and each a dreaded name ;  
These opened to them as anigh they came,  
And then again drew close, and hemmed them in,  
Nor spared they speech or laughter, and the din  
Was great among them as all silently  
The men of Herdholt passed the door-posts by.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then through the hall's dusk Kiartan gazed, and saw  
Small space whereby his company might draw  
Nigh to the king, for there so thick men stood  
That their tall spears were like a wizard's wood.  
Now some way from the daïs must they stand  
Where sat the king, and close to his right hand  
The German bishop, but no heed at all  
The king gave to our folk, as down the hall  
His marshal cried for silence, and the din  
Being quite appeased, in a clear voice and thin  
The holy man 'gan to set forth the faith;  
But for these men brought nigh the gate of Death,  
Hard was it now to weigh the right and wrong  
Of what he said, that seemed both dull and long.

So when at last he came unto an end,  
Uprose the king, and o'er the place did send  
A mighty voice: "Now have ye heard the faith,  
And what the High God through his servant saith;  
This is my faith: what say ye to it, then?"

Uprose a great shout from King Olaf's men,  
And clash of tossing spears, and Bodli set  
His hand upon his sword, while Kiartan yet  
Stood still, and, smiling, eyed the king: and he  
Turned on him as the din fell:

"What say ye,  
What say ye, Icelanders? thou specially?  
I call thee yet a year too young to die,  
Son of my namesake; neither seem'st thou such  
As who would trust in Odin overmuch,  
Or pray long prayers to Thor, while yet thy sword  
Hangs by thy side."

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Now at the king's first word  
Down Kiartan stooped, and 'gan his shoe to lace,  
And a dumb growl went through the crowded place  
Like the far thunder while the sky is bright ;  
But when he rose again and stood upright  
The king cried out :

“ Which man of these is he  
Who counselled you to slay no man but me  
Amid my guards ? ”

Kiartan stood forth a space ;  
And said : “ E'en so, O king, thou biddst him face  
Of his own will, the thing that all men fear,  
Swift death and certain—king, the man is here,  
And in his own land, Kiartan Olafson  
Men called him—pity that his days are done,  
For fair maids loved him.”

As he said the word  
From out its sheath flamed forth the rover's sword,  
And Bodli was beside him, and the hall  
Was filled with fury now from wall to wall,  
And back to back now stood the Herdholt band,  
Each with his weapon gleaming in his hand.

Then o'er the clamour was the king's voice heard ;  
“ Peace, men of mine, too quickly are ye stirred !  
Do ye not see how that this man and I  
Alone of men still let our sharp swords lie  
Within their sheaths ? Wise is the man to know  
How troublous things among great men will go.  
Speak, Kiartan Olafson ! I offer thee  
That in my court here thou abide with me,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Keeping what faith thou wilt ; but let me deal  
To these thy fellows either bane or weal,  
As they shall do my bidding."

"Kinglike then,"

Said Kiartan, "dost thou speak about these men ;  
Yea, like a fool, who knowest not the earth,  
And what things thereon bring us woe or mirth ;  
No man there is of these but calls me friend ;  
Yea, and if all truth but this truth should end,  
And sire, and love, and all were false to me,  
Still should I look on my right hand to see  
Bodli the son of Thorleik—Come, then, death,  
Thy yokefellow am I."

Then from his sheath  
Outsprang his sword, and even therewithal  
Clear rang the Iceland shout amidst the hall,  
And in a short space had the tale been o'er,  
But therewith Olaf stilled the noise once more,  
And smiling said :

"Thou growest angry, man !

Content thee, thou it was the strife began,  
And now thou hast the best of it ; come, then,  
And sit beside me ; thou and thy good men  
Shall go in peace—only, bethink thee how  
In idle poet's lies thou needst must trow—  
Make no delay to take me by the hand,  
Not meet it is that 'neath me thou shouldst stand."

To Kiartan's face, pale erst with death, there rose  
A sudden flush, and then his lips, set close,  
And knitted brow, grew soft, and in his eyes

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

There came at first a look of great surprise,  
Then kind they grew, and with shamefaced smile  
He looked upon the king a little while,  
Then slowly sank his sword, and, taking it  
By the sharp point, to where the king did sit  
He made his way, and said :

“Nay, thou hast won ;

Do thou for me what no man yet has done,  
And take my sword, and leave me weaponless :  
And if thy Christ is one who e'en can bless  
An earthly man, or heed him aught at all,  
On me too let his love and blessing fall ;  
But if nor Christ, nor Odin help, why, then  
Still at the worst are we the sons of men,  
And will we, will we not, yet must we hope,  
And after unknown happiness must grope,  
Since the known fails us, as the elders say ;  
Though sooth, for me, who know no evil day,  
Are all these things but words.”

“Put back thy blade,”

The king said, “thereof may I be apaid,  
With thee to wield it for me ; and now, come,  
Deem of my land and house e'en as thy home,  
For surely now I know that this thy smile  
The heart from man or maid can well beguile.”

As the king spake, drew Bodli nigh the place,  
And a strange look withal there crossed his face ;  
It seemed he waited as a man in dread  
What next should come ; but little Kiartan said  
Save thanks unto the king, and gayer now

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Than men had seen him yet, he 'gan to grow.  
Then gave the king command, and presently  
All strife was swallowed of festivity,  
And in all joyance the time slipped away,  
And a fair ending crowned a troublous day.

Great love there grew 'twixt Kiartan and the king  
From that time forth, and many a noble thing  
Was planned betwixt them; and ere Yule was o'er  
White raiment in the Minster, Kiartan bore,  
And he and his were hallowed at the font.

Now so I deem it is, that use and wont,  
The lords of men, the masks of many a face,  
Raising the base perchance, somewhat abase  
Those that are wise and noble; even so  
O'er Kiartan's head as day by day did go,  
Worthier the king's court, and its ways 'gan seem  
Than many a thing whereof he erst did dream,  
And gay he grew beyond the wont of men.

Now with the king dwelt Ingibiorg as then,  
His sister; unwed was she, fair of face,  
Beloved and wise, not lacking any grace  
Of mind or body: often it befell  
That she and Kiartan met, and more than well  
She 'gan to love him; and he let her love,  
Saying withal, that nought at all might move  
His heart from Gudrun; and for very sooth  
He might have held that word; but yet for ruth,  
And a soft pleasure that he would not name,  
All unrebuked he let her soft eyes claim

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Kindness from his ; and surely to the king  
This love of theirs seemed a most happy thing,  
And to himself he promised merry days,  
And had in heart so Kiartan's state to raise  
That he should be a king too.

But meanwhile,  
Silent would Bodli go, without a smile  
Upon his sad changed face from morn to eve ;  
And often now the thronged hall would he leave  
To wander by the borders of the sea,  
Waiting, half dreading, till some news should free  
The band of Icelanders ; most wearily  
Month after month to him the days dragged by.

For ye shall know that the king looked for news  
Whether the folk of Iceland would refuse,  
At the priest Thangbrand's word, to change their faith ;  
A man of violence, the story saith,  
A lecher, and a manslayer—tidings came  
While yet the summer at its height did flame,  
And Thangbrand brought it ; little could he do,  
Although indeed two swordsmen stout he slew,  
Unto the holy faith folk's hearts to turn.  
Hall of the Side, as in the tale we learn,  
Gizur the White, and Hialti Skeggison,  
With some few others, to the faith were won,  
The most of men little these things would heed,  
And some were furious heathens ; so, indeed,  
To save his life he had to flee away.

Wroth was the king hereat, and now would stay  
The Iceland ships from sailing ; little fain

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Was Kiartan yet to get him back again,  
Since he, forgetting not the former days—  
It might be—passed his life fulfilled of praise,  
And love, and glory. So the time went on,  
Gizur the White and Hialti Skeggison,  
Fleeing from Iceland, in the autumn-tide  
Came out to Norway with the king to bide  
Until the summer came, when they should go  
Once more the truth of Christ's fair lore to show.  
Long ago now of Gudrun and her ways,  
And of the coming of those happy days  
That were to be, had Kiartan ceased to speak  
Unto his friend; who sullen now and weak,  
Weary with waiting, faint with holding back  
He scarcely knew from what, did surely lack  
Some change of days if yet he was to live.  
Tidings the new comers to him did give  
From Laxdale, speaking lightly of the thing  
That like a red-hot iron hand did wring  
His weary heart; Gudrun was fair and well,  
And still at Bathstead in good hope did dwell  
Of Kiartan's swift return. That word or two,  
That name, wrought in him, that at last he knew  
His longing, and intent; and desolate  
The passing of the days did he await,  
Torn by remorse, tortured by fear, lest yet  
Kiartan the lapse of strange days should forget,  
And take to heart the old familiar days,  
And once more turn him to the bygone ways  
Where they were happy—but his fear was vain,  
For if his friend of Iceland had been fain



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Scarce had he gone ; the king would keep him there  
A pledge with other three, till he should hear  
What thing the Icelanders this time would do,  
Nor, as we said, had he good will to go  
Whatso his power was : for suchwise things went  
With Ingibiorg, that folk with one consent  
Named her his bride that was to be, and said,  
That sure a nobler pair were never wed.

And so the time passed, till the day came round  
When at the quay the ships lay Iceland-bound,  
And Bodli went to bid his friend farewell,  
Flushed and bright-eyed, for wild hope, sooth to tell,  
Had striven with shame, and cast its light on love,  
Until a fairer sky there seemed above,  
A fairer earth about, and still most fair  
The fresh green sea that was to bring him there,  
Whereon his heart was set.

“ O gay ! O gay ! ”  
Said Kiartan, “ thou art glad to go away ;  
This is the best face I have seen on thee  
Since first our black oars smote the Burgfirth sea.”

But as he spake a dark flush and a frown  
Swallowed up Bodli's smile ; he cast adown  
His eager eyes : “ Thou art as glad to stay,  
Belike,” he said, “ as I to go away.  
What thinkest thou I plot against thee then ? ”

“ Thou art the strangest of the sons of men,”  
Said Kiartan, with a puzzled look. “ Come now,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Leave off thy riddles, clear thy troubled brow,  
And let me think of thee as in time past,  
When ever a most merry lad thou wast !  
Why talkest thou of plotting ? True and leal  
I deem thee ever as the well-tried steel  
That hangs beside thee ; neither cross at all  
Our fond desires. Though whatso thing may fall  
Still shall I trust thee."

His own face grew grave  
As o'er his heart there swept a sudden wave  
Of the old thoughts. But Bodli said, " O friend,  
Forgive my face fair looks and foul ; I wend  
Back to our kin and land, that gladdens me.  
I leave thee here behind across the sea,  
That makes me sad and sour."

He did not raise  
His eyes up midst his words, or meet the gaze  
Kiartan bent on him, till again he said :

" Olaf shall hear of all the goodlihead  
Thou gainest here. Thy brethren shall be glad  
That thou such honour from all men hast had.  
Oswif the Wise no doubt I soon shall see—  
What shall I say to him ? "

Then steadily  
Gazed Kiartan on him. " Tell Gudrun all this  
Thou knowest of, my honour and my bliss ;  
Say we shall meet again ! "

No more they spake,  
But kissed and parted ; either's heart did ache  
A little while with thought of the old days ;  
Then Bodli to the future turned his gaze,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Unhappy and remorseful, knowing well  
How ill his life should go whate'er befell.  
But Kiartan, left behind, being such a man  
As through all turns of fortune never can  
Hold truce with fear or sorrow, lived his life  
Not ill content with all the change and strife.

Fair goes the ship that beareth our Christ's truth,  
Mingled of hope, of sorrow, and of ruth,  
And on the prow Bodli the Christian stands,  
Sunk deep in thought of all the many lands  
The world holds, and the folk that dwell therein,  
And wondering why that grief and rage and sin  
Was ever wrought; but wondering most of all  
Why such wild passion on his heart should fall.

### *Bodli brings Tidings to Bathstead*

NOW so it chanced, on a late summer day,  
Unto the west would Oswif take his way  
With all his sons, and Gudrun listlessly  
Stood by the door their going forth to see,  
Until the hill's brow hid them; then she turned,  
And long she gazed, the while her full heart yearned  
Toward Herdholt and the south.

“Late grows the year,”

She said, “and winter cometh with its fear  
And dreams of dying hopes. Ah me, I change,  
And my heart hardens! Will he think me strange  
When he beholds this face of mine at last,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Or shall our love make nought of long days past,  
Burn up the sights that we apart have seen,  
And make them all as though they had not been?  
Ah, the hard world! I, who in hope so sure  
Have waited, scarcely may the days endure.  
How has it been with those who needs must wait  
With dying hope and lingering love, till hate,  
The seed of ill lies, told and hearkened to,  
The knot of loving memories shall undo,  
Break the last bonds of love, and cast them forth  
With nothing left to them of joy or worth?

“O love, come back, come back, delay no more  
To ease thine aching heart that yearneth sore  
For me, as mine for thee! Leave wealth and praise  
For those to win who know no happy days.  
Come, though so true thou art, thou fearest not  
Yet to delay! Come, my heart waxes hot  
For all thy lonely days to comfort thee.”

So spake she, and awhile stood quietly,  
Still looking toward the south, her wide grey eyes  
Made tenderer with those thronging memories,  
Until upon the wind she seemed to hear  
The sound of horse-hoofs, and 'twixt hope and fear  
She trembled, as more clear the far sounds grew,  
And thitherward it seemed from Herdholt drew;  
So now at last to meet that sound she went,  
Until her eyes, on the hill's brow intent,  
Beheld a spear rising against the sky  
O'er the grey road, and therewith presently  
A gilded helm rose up beneath the spear,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And then her trembling limbs no more might bear  
Her body forward ; scarce alive she stood,  
And saw a man in raiment red as blood  
Rise o'er the hill's brow, who when he did gain  
The highest part of the grey road, drew rein  
To gaze on Bathstead spreading 'neath him there,  
Its bright vanes glittering in the morning air.  
She stared upon him panting, and belike  
He saw her now, for he his spurs did strike  
Into his horse, and, while her quivering face  
Grew hard and stern, rode swiftly to the place  
Whereas she stood, and clattering leapt adown  
Unto the earth, and met her troubled frown  
And pale face, with the sad imploring eyes  
Of Bodli Thorleikson.

Then did there rise  
A dreadful fear within her heart, for she  
No look like that in him was wont to see ;  
Scarce had she strength to say :  
“ How goes it then,  
With him—thy kinsman, mid the Eastland men ? ”

Then, writhen as with some great sudden sting  
Of pain, he spake ; “ Fear not, Gudrun, I bring  
Fair news of his well-doing—he is well.”

“ Speak out,” she said, “ what more there is to tell !  
Is he at Herdholt ? will he come to-day ? ”

And with that word she turned her face away,  
Shamed with the bitter-sweet of yearning pain,  
And to her lips the red blood came again ;

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But he a moment made as he would reach  
His hand to hers, his sad eyes did beseech  
Some look from hers, so blind to him, so blind !  
And scarce his story might he call to mind,  
Until he deemed he saw her shoulders heave  
As with a sob.

Then said he, " We did leave  
Kiartan in Norway, praised of all men there ;  
He bade me tell thee that his life was fair  
And full of hope—and that he looked to see  
Thy face again.—So God be good to me,  
These were the words he spake ! "

For now she turned  
Tearless upon him, and great anger burned  
Within her eyes : " O trusty messenger,  
No doubt through thee his very voice I hear !  
Sure but light thought and stammering voice he had  
To waste on one, who used to make him glad !  
Thou art a true friend ! Ah, I know thee, then,  
A follower on the footsteps of great men,  
To reap where they have sowed. Alive and well !  
And doing deeds whereof the skalds shall tell !  
Ah, what fair days he heapeth up for me !  
Come now, unless thine envy stayeth thee,  
Speak more of him, and make me glad at heart ! "

Then Bodli said, " Nay, I have done my part,  
Let others tell the rest "—and turned to go,  
Yet lingered, and she cried aloud :

" No, no,  
Friend of my lover ! if ill words I spake

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Yet pardon me ! for sore my heart doth ache  
With pent-up love."

She reached her hand to him,  
He turned and took it, and his eyes did swim  
With tears for him and her ; a while it seemed,  
As though the dream so many a sweet night dreamed  
Waked from with anguish on so many a morn,  
Were come to pass, that he afresh was born  
To happy life, with heavens and earth made new ;  
But slowly from his grasp her hand she drew,  
And stepped aback, and said :

"Speak, I fear not,  
Because so true a heart my love hath got  
That nought can change it ; speak, when cometh he ?  
Tell me the sweet words that he spake of me.  
Did he not tell me in the days agoe,  
That oft he spake of me to thee alone ?  
Nay, tell me of his doings, for indeed  
Of words 'twixt him and me is little need."

Then Bodli 'gan in troubled voice to tell  
True tidings of the things that there befell,  
Saving of Ingibiorg, and Gudrun stood  
And hearkened, trembling :

"Good, yea, very good,"  
She said, when he had done, "and yet I deem  
All this thou say'st as if we dreamed a dream ;  
Nor cam'st thou here to say but this to me—  
Why tarrieth Kiartan yet beyond the sea ?"

Bodli flushed red, and, trembling sorely, spake :  
"O Gudrun, must thou die for one man's sake,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So heavenly as thou art? What shall I say?  
Thou mayst live long, yet never see the day  
That bringeth Kiartan back unto this land."

He looked at her, but moveless did she stand,  
Nor spake a word, nor yet did any pain  
Writhe her fair face, grown deadly pale again.  
Then Bodli stretched his hand forth ;  
" Yet they lie,  
Who say I did the thing, who say that I,  
E'en in my inmost heart, have wished for it.  
But thou—O, hearken, Gudrun—he doth sit  
By Ingibiorg's side ever ; day by day,  
Sadder his eyes grow when she goes away—  
What ! know I not the eyes of lovers then?—  
Why should I tell thee of the talk of men,  
Babbling of how he weds her, is made king,  
How he and Olaf shall have might to bring  
Denmark and England both beneath their rule.  
—Ah, woe, woe, woe, that I, a bitter fool,  
Upon one heart all happy life should stake ;  
Woe is me, Gudrun, for thy beauty's sake !  
Ah, for my fool's eyes and my greedy heart  
Must all rest henceforth from my soul depart ? "

He reached his hand to her, she put it by,  
And gathered up her gown-skirts hurriedly,  
And in a voice, like a low wailing wind,  
Unto the wind she cried :  
" Still may he find  
A woman worthy of his loveliness ;



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Still may it be that she his days will bless,  
As I had done, had we been wed at last ! ”

Therewith by Bodli's trembling hands she passed,  
Nor gave one look on him ; but he gazed still,  
E'en when her gown fluttered far down the hill,  
With staring eyes upon the empty place  
Where last he saw the horror of her face  
Changed by consuming anguish ; when he turned,  
Blind with the fire that in his worn heart burned,  
Empty the hill-side was of any one,  
And as a man who some great crime hath done  
He gat into his saddle, and scarce knew  
Whither he went, until his rein he drew  
By Herdholt porch, as in the other days,  
When Kiartan by his side his love would praise.

Three days at Herdholt in most black despair  
Did Bodli sit, till folk 'gan whisper there  
That the faith-changer on the earth was dead,  
Although he seemed to live ; with mighty dread  
They watched his going out and coming in ;  
On the fourth day somewhat did hope begin  
To deal, as its wont is, with agony ;  
And he, who truly at the first could see  
What dreadful things his coming days did wait,  
Now, blinded by the hand of mocking fate,  
Deeming that good from evil yet might rise,  
Once more to pleasure lifted up his eyes.

And now, to nurse his hope, there came that day  
A messenger from Gudrun, who did pray

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

That he would straightly come and see her there.  
At whose mazed face a long while did he stare  
As one who heard not, and the man must speak  
His message thrice, before a smile 'gan break  
Over his wan face ; neither did he say  
A word in answer, but straight took his way  
O'er rough and smooth to Bathstead, knowing not  
What ground his horse beneath his hoofs had got.

Ah, did he look for pleasure, when he saw  
Her long slim figure down the dusk hall draw  
Unto his beating heart, as nobly clad  
As in the days when all the three were glad ?  
Did he perchance deem that he might forget  
The man across the sea ? His eyes were wet  
For pity of that heart so made forlorn,  
But on his lips a smile, of pleasure born,  
Played, that I deem perchance he knew not of,  
As he reached out his hand to touch his love  
Long ere she drew anigh. But now, when she  
Was close to him, and therewith eagerly,  
Trembling and wild-eyed, he beheld the face  
He deemed e'en then would gladden all the place,  
Blank grew his heart, and all hope failed in him,  
And e'en the anguish of his love grew dim,  
And poor it seemed, a thing of little price,  
Before the gathered sorrow of her eyes.

But while, still trembling there, the poor wretch stood,  
She spoke in a low voice that chilled his blood,  
So worn and far away it seemed ; " See now,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

I sent for thee, who of all men dost know  
The heart of him who once swore troth to me :  
Kiartan, I mean, the son of Olaf, he  
Who o'er the sea wins great fame as thou say'st---  
That thou mayst tell again, why he doth waste  
The tale of happy days that we shall have ;  
For death comes quickly on us, and the grave  
Is a dim land whereof I know not aught."

As a grey dove, within the meshes caught,  
Flutters a little, then lies still again  
Ere wildly beats its wings with its last pain,  
So once or twice her passion, as she spake,  
Rose to her throat, and yet might not outbreak  
Till that last word was spoken ; then as stung  
By pain on pain, her arms abroad she flung,  
And wailed aloud ; but dry-eyed Bodli stood  
Pale as a corpse, and in such haggard mood,  
Such helpless, hopeless misery, as one  
Who first in hell meets her he hath undone.  
Yet sank her wailing in a little while,  
Through dreadful sobs to silence, and a smile,  
A feeble memory of the courteous ways,  
For which in days ago she won such praise,  
Rose to her pale lips, and she spake once more  
As if the passionate words, cast forth before,  
Were clean forgotten, with that bitter wail :

" O, Bodli Thorleikson, of good avail  
Thou ever art to me, and now hast come  
Swiftly indeed unto a troubled home :

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For ill at ease I am, and fain would hear  
From thee who knowst him, why this looked-for year  
Lacks Kiartan still."

He knew not what to say,  
But she reached out her hand in the old way  
And coldly palm met palm : then him she led  
Unto a seat, and sat by him, and said :

"Yea, fain am I to hear the tale once more,  
The shame and grief, although it hurt me sore ;  
Yea, from thee, Bodli ; though it well may be  
That he I trusted, too much trusted thee."

So great a burden on his spirit lay  
He heeded not the last words she did say,  
But in low measured speech began again  
The story of the honour and the gain  
That Kiartan had, and how his days went now ;  
She sat beside him, with her head bent low,  
Harkening, or harkening not ; but now when all  
Was done, and he sat staring at the wall  
Silent, and full of misery, then she said :

"How know I yet but thou the tale hast made,  
Since many a moment do I think of now  
In the old time before ye went, when thou  
Wouldst look on me, as on him I should gaze  
If he were here, false to the happy days ?"

"A small thing," said he, "shall I strive with fate  
In vain, or vainly pray against thy hate?"

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Would God I were a liar ! that his keel  
E'en now the sands of White-river did feel.  
O Gudrun, Gudrun, thou shalt find it true !  
Ah, God, what thing is left for me to do ?”

Therewith he rose, and towards the hall-door went,  
Nor heard her voice behind him, as she bent  
O'er the tear-wetted rushes of the floor.  
Sick-hearted was he when he passed the door,  
Weary of all things, weary of his love,  
And muttering to himself hard things thereof :  
But when he reached the Herdholt porch again,  
A heaven long left seemed that morn's bitter pain,  
And one desire alone he had, that he  
Once more anigh unto his love might be ;  
Honour and shame, truth, lies, and weal and woe,  
Seemed idle words whose meaning none might know ;  
What was the world to him with all its ways,  
If he once more into her eyes might gaze ?

Again he saw her, not alone this tide,  
But in the hall, her father by her side,  
And many folk around : if like a dream  
All things except her loveliness did seem,  
Yet doubt ye not that evil shades they were ;  
A dream most horrible for him to bear,  
That all his strength was fallen to weakness now,  
That he the sweet repose might never know  
Of being with her from all the world apart,  
Eyes watching eyes, heart beating unto heart.  
Cold was her face, not pensive as before,  
And like a very queen herself she bore

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Among the guests, and courteous was to all,  
But no kind look on Bodli's face did fall,  
Though he had died to gain it.

So time wore,  
And still he went to Bathstead more and more,  
And whiles alone, and whiles in company,  
With raging heart her sad face did he see ;  
And still the time he spent in hall and bower  
Beside her did he call the evillest hour  
Of all the day, the while it dured ; but when  
He was away, came hope's ghost back again  
And fanned his miserable longing, till  
He said within himself that nought was ill  
Save that most hideous load of loneliness.  
Howso the time went, never rest did bless  
His heart a moment ; nought seemed good to him,  
Not e'en the rest of death, unknown and dim.

And Kiartan came not, and what news came out  
From Norway was a gravestone on such doubt  
As yet might linger in the hearts of men,  
That he perchance might see that land again.  
And no more now spake Gudrun any word  
Of Kiartan, until folk with one accord  
Began to say, how that no little thing  
It was, those two great strains of men to bring  
Into alliance : " Pity though ! " they said,  
" That she to such a strange man should be wed  
As Bodli Thorleikson of late hath grown ! "

So sprung the evil crop by evil sown.

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

### *Kiartan's Farewell to Norway*

MEANWHILE to Kiartan far across the sea,  
Unto all seeming, life went merrily ;  
Yet none the less the lapse of days would bring  
Unto his frank heart something of a sting,  
And Bodli's sad departing face and word,  
Not wholly thrust out from his memory, stirred  
Doubts of the changing days in Kiartan's mind,  
And scarce amid his joyance might he find  
The happy days he ever looked to have,  
Till he were lying silent in his grave.  
And somewhat more distraught now would he take  
The gentle words that the king's sister spake,  
And look into her eyes less fervently,  
And less forget the world when she drew nigh,  
And start and look around as her soft hand  
Fell upon his, as though a ghost did stand  
Anigh him, and he feared to hear it speak.

And Ingibiorg for her part, grown too weak  
Against the love she had for him to strive,  
Yet knew no less whither the days did drive  
Her wasted life ; and, seeing him as oft  
As she might do, and speaking sweet and soft,  
When they twain were together : smiling, too,  
Though fast away the lovesome time did go,  
Wept long through lonely hours, nor cast away  
From out her heart thought of the coming day,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

When all should be as it had never been,  
And the wild sea should roll its waves between  
His grey eyes and her weary useless tears.

But while she brooded o'er the coming years  
Empty of love, and snatched what joy there was  
Yet left to her, great tidings came to pass ;  
For late the summer after Bodli sailed,  
News came, that now at last had Christ prevailed  
In Iceland ; that the Hill of Laws had heard  
Sung through the clear air many a threatening word,  
And seen the weapons gather for the fight ;  
Till Snorri's wiles, Hall's wisdom, Gizur's might,  
And fears of many men, and wavering doubt  
On the worse side, had brought it so about  
That now Christ's faith was law to everyone :  
The learned say, a thousand years ago  
Since the cold shepherds in the winter night  
Beheld and heard the angels' fresh delight.

King Olaf's heart swelled at such news as these,  
Straightway he sent for the four hostages,  
And bade them with good gifts to go their ways  
If so they would ; or stay and gather praise  
And plenteous honour there ; and as he spake  
He glanced at Kiartan, and a smile did break  
Across his kingly face, as who would say,  
"Thou at the least wilt scarcely go away."  
But Kiartan answered not the smile, but stood  
Grave with deep thought, and troubled in his mood,  
Until he saw his fellows looked that he  
Should speak for all ; then said he presently :



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

“Thanks have thou, King, for all that thou hast done  
To us, and the great honour I have won  
At thine hands here ; yet be not angry, King,  
If still we thank thee most for this one thing,  
That here thou stay’st us not against our will ;  
Thicker is blood than water, say I still ;  
This is the third year since I left my kin  
And land—and other things that dwell therein.”

The king’s face fell, and in sharp words and few  
He answered : “ Well, a gift I gave to you,  
And will not take it back—Go, Kiartan, then,  
And, if thou canst, find kinder, truer men,  
And lovelier maids in thy land than in this ! ”

But Kiartan said, “ King, take it not amiss !  
Thou knowest I have ever said to thee,  
That I must one day go across the sea ;  
Belike I shall come back upon a tide,  
And show thee such a wonder of a bride  
As earth holds not, nay nor the heavens, I deem.”

“ God send thee a good ending to thy dream ;  
Yet my heart cries that if thou goest from me,  
Thy pleasant face I never more shall see ;  
Be merry then, while fate will have it so ! ”

So therewith unto high feast did they go,  
And by the king sat Kiartan, and the day  
’Twixt merry words and sad thoughts wore away.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Now were the ships got ready, and the wares  
Drawn for long months past from the upland fairs  
Were laid ashipboard. Kálf was skipper still  
Of Kiartan's ship, for never had he will  
To leave his side. Now restless Kiartan was,  
And longed full sore for these last days to pass,  
For in his heart there lurked a spark of fear,  
Nor any word of Gudrun might he hear  
From those who brought the news of change of faith,  
Since nigh the fleet they dwelt, my story saith,  
In the south country, and knew nought at all  
Of what in Laxdale late had chanced to fall.

Now by their bridges lay the laden ships,  
And he now at the last must see the lips  
Of Ingibiorg grow pale with their farewell ;  
And sick at heart he grew, for, sooth to tell,  
He feared her sorrow much, and furthermore  
He loved her with a strange love very sore,  
Despite the past and future. So he went  
Sad-eyed amid the hall's loud merriment  
Unto her bower on that last morn of all.

Alone she was, her head against the wall  
Had fallen ; her heavy eyes were shut when he  
Stood on the threshold ; she rose quietly,  
Hearing the clash of arms, and took his hand,  
And thus with quivering lips awhile did stand  
Regarding him : but he made little show  
Of manliness, but let the hot tears flow  
Fast o'er his cheeks. At last she spake :

“ Weep then !

If thou who art the kindest of all men

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Must sorrow for me, yet more glad were I  
To see thee leave my bower joyfully  
This last time ; that when o'er thee sorrow came,  
And thought of me therewith, thou mightst not blame  
My little love for ever saddening thee.  
Love !—let me say love once—great shalt thou be,  
Beloved of all, and dying ne'er forgot.  
Farewell ! farewell ! farewell ! and think thou not  
That in my heart there lingers any hate  
Of her who through these years for thee did wait.  
A weary waiting—three long, long, long years,  
Well over now ; nay, when of me she hears,  
Fain were I she should hate me not. Behold,  
Here is a coif, well wrought of silk and gold  
By folk of Micklegarth, who had no thought  
Of thee or me, and thence by merchants brought  
Who perchance loved not. Is Gudrun too fair  
To take this thing, a queen might long to wear ?  
Upon the day when on the bench ye sit,  
Hand held in hand, crown her fair head with it,  
And tell her whence thou hadst it. Ah, farewell,  
Lest of mine eyes thou shouldst have worse to tell  
Than now thou hast ! ”

Therewith she turned from him  
And took the coif, wherein the gold was dim  
With changing silken threads, the linen white  
Scarce seen amid the silk and gold delight.  
With hands that trembled little did she fold  
The precious thing, and set its weight of gold  
Within a silken bag ; and then to his  
She reached her hands, and in one bitter kiss

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Tasted his tears, while a great wave of thought  
Of what sweet things the changed years might have  
brought

Swept over her—and then she knew him gone,  
And yet for all that scarcely felt more lone  
Than for a many days past she had felt.  
So with fixed eyes she drew into her belt  
Her kirtle, and to this and that thing turned  
With heart that ever for the long rest yearned.

Bearing that gift, but heeding not what thing  
He had with him, came Kiartan to the king,  
Who in the porch abode him, his great men  
Standing around ; then said he :

“ Welcome then

This last day that I see thee ; go we forth,  
Fair lords, and see his ship's head greet the north,  
For seldom from the north shall any come  
Like unto him to greet us in our home.”

So forth they went, and all the Iceland men  
Gat them aboard, and skipper Kálf by then  
Stood midway on the last bridge, while the king  
'Gan say to Kiartan :

“ Many a treasured thing  
Had I laid down, O friend, to keep thee here,  
But since the old thing still must be more dear  
Than the new thing, to such men as thou art,  
Now, with my goodwill, to thy love depart,  
And leave me here the coming woes to meet  
Without thee. May thy life be fair and sweet,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Nor yet drag on till present days are nought,  
And all the past days a tormenting thought!  
Take this last gift of me; a noble sword,  
Which if thou dost according to my word,  
Shall never leave thy side; for who can know  
Ere all is o'er, how madly things may go?"

So Kiartan took the sword, and thanked the king,  
With no light heart, for that and everything  
That at his hands he had, and therewith crossed  
The gangway; shoreward were the hawsers tossed,  
The long sweeps smote the water, and the crew  
Shouted their last farewell; the white sail drew,  
'Twixt Norway and the stern, swept in the sea.

There stood the king, and long time earnestly  
Looked on the lessening ship; then said at last,  
As o'er his knitted brow his hand he passed:  
"Go thy ways, Kiartan; great thou art indeed,  
And great thy kin are, nathless shalt thou need  
Stout heart enough to meet what waiteth thee  
If aught mine eyes of things to come may see."

*Kiartan back in Iceland; Refna comes  
into the Tale*

KIARTAN and Kálf in Burgfirth came aland  
And raised their tents anigh unto the strand,  
As in the summer-tide the fashion was

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Of mariners, the while the news did pass  
That they were come out, through the country-side,  
And there awhile that summer would abide.  
Now when to Herdholt did that tidings come,  
Olaf and all his sons were gone from home :  
So Kiartan saw them not at first, among  
The folk that to the newcomers did throng ;  
Amidst the first of whom, he, none the less,  
Noted his friend Gudmund of Asbiornsness,  
Who to his sister Thurid now was wed,  
And brought her with him ; with all goodlihead  
He greeted them, yet Kiartan deemed that they  
Looked on him strangely ; on the self-same day  
Kálf's father, Asgeir, came, and brought with him  
Refna, his daughter, fair of face and limb,  
Dark-haired, great-eyed, and gentle : timidly  
She gazed at Kiartan as he drew anigh  
And gave her welcome.

Now as he began  
To ask them news of this and that good man,  
And how he fared, Thurid with anxious face  
Came up to him, and drew him from the place,  
Saying, " Come, talk with me apart awhile ! "  
He followed after with a puzzled smile,  
Yet his heart felt as something ill drew near.  
So, when they came where none their speech might  
hear,  
Thurid turned round about on him, and said,  
" Brother, amidst thy speech, I shook with dread  
Lest Gudrun's name from out thy lips should burst ;  
How was it then thou spak'st not of her first ? "

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Then Kiartan, trembling, said, "Indeed, I thought  
That news of ill unasked would soon be brought—  
Sister, what ails thee then—is my love dead?"

"Nay," Thurid stammered, "she is well—and wed."

"What!" cried out Kiartan, "and the Peacock's  
house?"

I used to deem my brothers valorous,  
My father a great man—and Bodli's sword,  
Where was it midst this shame?"

Scarce was the word  
Out of his lips, ere, looking on her face,  
He turned and staggered wildly from the place,  
Crying aloud, "O blind, O blind, O blind!  
Where is the world I used to deem so kind,  
So loving to me? O Gudrun, Gudrun,  
Here I come back with all the honour won  
We talked of, that thou saidst thou knewest well  
Was but for thee—to whom then shall I tell  
The tale of that well-doing? And thou, friend,  
How might I deem that aught but death should end  
Our love together? yea, and even now,  
How shall I learn to hate thee, friend, though thou  
Art changed into a shadow and a lie?  
O ill day of my birth, ill earth and sky,  
Why was I then bemocked with days of bliss  
If still the ending of them must be this?  
O wretch, that once wast happy, days a-gone,  
Before thou wert so wretched and alone,  
How on unhappy faces wouldst thou look  
And scarce with scorn and ruth their sorrow brook!

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Now then at last thou knowest of the earth,  
And why the elders look askance on mirth."

Some paces had he gone from where she stood,  
Gazing in terror on his hapless mood,  
And now she called his name; he turned about,  
And far away he heard the shipmen's shout  
And beat of the sea, and from the down there came  
The bleat of ewes; and all these, and his name,  
And the sights too, the green down 'neath the sun,  
The white strand and the far-off hillsides dun,  
And white birds wheeling, well-known things did seem,  
But pictures now or figures in a dream,  
With all their meaning lost. Yet therewithal  
On his vexed spirit did the new thought fall  
How weak and helpless and alone he was.  
Then gently to his sister did he pass,  
And spake:

"Now is the world clean changed for me  
In this last minute, yet indeed I see  
That still will it go on for all my pain;  
Come then, my sister, let us back again;  
I must meet folk, and face the life beyond,  
And, as I may, walk 'neath the dreadful bond  
Of ugly pain—such men our fathers were,  
Not lightly bowed by any weight of care."

She smiled upon him kindly, and they went  
And found folk gathered in the biggest tent,  
And busied o'er the wares, and gay enow  
In outward seeming; though ye well may know  
Folk dreaded much for all the country's sake



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

In what wise Kiartan this ill news would take.  
Now Kálf had brought the gayest things to show  
The women-folk, and by a bale knelt now  
That Kiartan knew right well, and close by him  
Sat Refna, with her dainty hand and slim  
Laid on a broidered bag, her fair head crowned  
With that rich coif thereafter so renowned  
In Northland story. As he entered there  
She raised to him her deep grey eyes, and fair  
Half-opened mouth, and blushed blood-red therewith;  
And inwardly indeed did Kiartan writhe  
With bitter anguish as his eyes did meet  
Her bright-flushed gentle face so pure and sweet;  
And he thenceforth to have no lot or part  
In such fair things; yet struggling with his heart  
He smiled upon her kindly. Pale she grew  
When the flush passed, as though in sooth she knew  
What sickness ailed him.

“Be not wroth,” she said,  
“That I have got this queen’s gift on my head,  
I bade them do it not.”

Then wearily  
He answered: “Surely it beseemeth thee  
Right well, and they who set it there did right.  
Rich were the man who owned the maiden bright,  
And the bright coif together!”

As he spake  
Wandered his eyes; so sore his heart did ache  
That not for long those matters might he note;  
Yet a glad flush again dyed face and throat  
Of Refna, and she said, “So great and famed,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So fair and kind ! where shall the maid be named  
To say no to thine asking ? ”

Once again

All pale she grew, for stung by sudden pain  
Kiartan turned round upon the shrinking maid,  
And, laughing wildly, with a scowl he said :  
“ All women are alike to me—all good—  
All blessings on this fair earth by the rood ! ”

Then silence fell on all, yet he began  
Within awhile to talk to maid and man  
Mildly as he was wont, and through the days  
That they abode together in that place  
Seemed little changed ; and so his father thought  
When he to him at last his greeting brought,  
And bade him home to Herdholt. So they rode,  
Talking of many things, to his abode,  
Nor naming Gudrun aught. Thus Kiartan came  
Back to his father’s house, grown great of fame,  
And tidingless a while day passed by day  
What hearts soe’er ’neath sorrow’s millstone lay.

*Tidings brought to Bathstead of Kiartan’s  
coming back*

YES, there the hills stood, there Lax-river ran  
Down to the sea ; still thrall and serving-man  
Came home from fold and hayfield to the hall,  
And still did Olaf’s cheery deep voice call

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Over the mead horns ; danced the fiddle-bow,  
And twanged the harp-strings, and still sweet enow  
Were measured words, as someone skilled in song  
Told olden tales of war, and love, and wrong.  
—And Bodli's face from hall and board was gone,  
And Gudrun's arms were round him, as alone  
They lay, all unrebuked that hour, unless  
The dawn, that glimmered on the wretchedness  
Of Kiartan's lone and sleepless night, should creep  
Cold-footed o'er their well-contented sleep,  
And whisper, "Sleep on, lapse of time is here  
Death's brother, and the very Death is near !"

Such thoughts might haunt the poor deserted man,  
When through the sky dawn's hopeless shiver ran,  
And bitterness grew in him, as the day,  
Cleared of fantastic half-dreams, cold and grey,  
Was bared before him. Yet I deem, indeed,  
That they no less of pity had good need.  
Yea, had his eyes beheld that past high-tide  
At Bathstead, where sat Gudrun as a bride  
By Bodli Thorleikson ! Her face of yore,  
So swift to change, as changing thoughts passed o'er  
Her eager heart, set now into a smile  
That scarce the fools of mankind might beguile  
To deeming her as happy : his, once calm  
With dreamy happiness, that would embalm  
Into sweet memory things of yesterday,  
And show him pictures of things far away,  
Now drawn, and fierce, and anxious, still prepared,  
It seemed, to meet the worst his worn heart feared.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

A dismal wedding! every ear at strain  
Some sign of things that were to be to gain;  
A guard on every tongue lest some old name  
Should set the poisoned smouldering pile aflame.  
Silent the fierce dull sons of Oswif drank,  
And Olaf back into his high seat shrank,  
And seemed aged wearily, the while his sons  
Glanced doubtfully at Bodli; more than once  
Did one of them begin some word to speak,  
And catch his father's eye, and then must break  
His speech off with a smile not good or kind;  
And in meanwhile the wise would fain be blind  
To all these things, or cover boisterously  
The seeds of ill they could not fail to see.

But if 'neath all folk's eyes things went e'en so,  
How would it be then with the hapless two  
The morrow of that feast? This know I well,  
That upon Bodli the last gate of hell  
Seemed shut at last, and no more like a star  
Far off perchance, yet bright however far,  
Shone hope of better days; yet he lived on,  
And soon indeed, the worst of all being won,  
And gleams of frantic pleasure therewithal,  
A certain quiet on his soul did fall,  
As though he saw the end and waited it.  
But over Gudrun changes wild would flit,  
And sometimes stony would she seem to be;  
And sometimes would she give short ecstasy  
To Bodli with a fit of seeming love;  
And sometimes, as repenting sore thereof,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Silent the live-long day would sit and stare,  
As though she knew some ghost were drawing near,  
And ere it came with all the world must break,  
That she might lose no word it chanced to speak.

So slowly led the changed and weary days  
Unto the gateway of the silent place,  
Where either rest or utter change shall be ;  
But on an eve, when summer peacefully  
Yielded to autumn, as men sat in hall  
Two wandering churles old Oswif forth did call  
Into the porch, and asked for shelter there.  
And since unheeded none might make such prayer,  
Soon 'mid the boisterous house-carles were they set,  
The ugly turns of fortune to forget  
In mirth and ease, and still with coarse rude jest  
They pleased the folk, and laughed out with the best.  
But while the lower hall of mirth was full  
More than their wont the great folk there were dull ;  
Oswif was sunk in thought of other days,  
And Gudrun's tongue idly some tale did praise  
Her brother Ospak told, the while her heart  
Midst vain recurring hopes was set apart ;  
And Bodli looked as though he still did bide  
The coming fate it skilled no more to hide  
From his sore wearied heart : no more there were  
Upon the daïs that eve ; but when the cheer  
Was over now, old Oswif went his ways,  
But Ospak sat awhile within his place  
Staring at Bodli with a look of scorn ;  
For much he grew to hate that face forlorn,  
Bowed down with cares he might not understand.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

At last midst Gudrun's talk, with either hand  
Stretched out did Ospak yawn, and cried aloud  
Unto the lower table's merry crowd :  
" Well fare ye, fellows ! ye are glad to-night ;  
What thing is it that brings you such delight ?  
We be not merry here."

Then one stepped forth,  
And said : " Sooth, Ospak, but of little worth  
Our talk was ; yet these wandering churles are full  
Of meat and drink, and need no rope to pull  
Wild words and gleesome from them."

" Bring them here,  
Said Ospak, " they may mend our doleful cheer."

So from the lower end they came, ill clad,  
Houseless, unwashen, yet with faces glad,  
If for a while ; yet somewhat timorous, too,  
With such great men as these to have to do,  
Although to fear was drink a noble shield.

" Well, fellows, what fair tidings are afield ? "  
Said Ospak, " and whence come ye ? "

The first man  
Turned leering eyes on Bodli's visage wan,  
And o'er his face there spread a cunning grin.  
But just as he his first word would begin,  
The other, drunker, and a thought more wise  
Maybe for that, said, screwing up his eyes,  
" Say-all-you-know shall go with clouted head."

" Say-nought-at-all is beaten," Ospak said,  
" If, with his belly full of great men's meat,  
He has no care to make his speeches sweet."

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

“Be not wroth, son of Oswif,” said the first;  
“Now I am full I care not for the worst  
That haps to-night; yet Mistress Gudrun there——”

“Tush!” said the second, “thou art full of care  
For a man full of drink. Come, let her say  
That as we came so shall we go away,  
And all is soon told.”

Ospak laughed thereat,  
As sprawling o’er the laden board he sat,  
His cheek close to his cup; but Gudrun turned  
Unto him, pale, although her vexed heart burned  
With fresh desire, and a great agony  
Of hope strove in her.

“Tell thy tale to me  
And have a gift therefor,” she said: “behold!  
My finger is no better for this gold!  
Draw it off swiftly!”

Then she reached her hand  
Out to the man, who wondering there did stand  
Beholding it, half sobered by her face;  
Nor durst he touch the ring.

“Unto this place  
From Burgfirth did we come,” he said, “and there  
Around a new-beached ship folk held a fair—  
Kálf Asgeirson, men said, the skipper was—  
But others to and fro did I see pass.”

Still Ospak chuckled, lolling o’er his drink,  
Nor any whit hereat did Gudrun shrink,  
But Bodli rose up, and the hall ’gan pace,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

As on the last time when in that same place  
Kiartan and he and she together were ;  
And on this day of anguish and of fear,  
Well-nigh his weary heart began to deem  
That that past day did but begin a dream  
From which he needs must wake up presently,  
Those lovers in each other's arms to see,  
To feel himself heart-whole and innocent ;  
“Yea, yea, a many people came and went  
About the ship,” he heard the first guest say ;  
“Gudmund and Thurid did I see that day,  
And Asgeir and his daughter, and they stood  
About a man, whose kirtle, red as blood,  
Was fine as a king's raiment.”

Ospak here  
Put up his left hand slowly to his ear,  
As one who hearkens, smiling therewithal,  
And now there fell a silence on the hall,  
As the man said :

“I had not seen before  
This fair tall man, who in his sword-belt bore  
A wondrous weapon, gemmed, and wrought with gold ;  
Too mean a man I was to be so bold  
As in that place to ask about his name.  
—Yet certes, mistress, to my mind it came,  
That, if tales lied not, this was even he  
Men said should wed a bride across the sea  
And be a king—e'en Kiartan Olafson.”

He looked about him when his speech was done  
As one who feareth somewhat, but the word



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

He last had said, nought new belike had stirred  
In those three hearts ; Bodli still paced the floor  
With downcast eyes, that sometimes to the door  
Were lifted ; Ospak beat upon the board  
A swift tune with his hand ; without a word  
The gold ring from her finger Gudrun drew  
And gave it to the man ; and Ospak knew  
A gift of Bodli Thorleikson therein,  
Given when first her promise he did win.  
Yet little wisdom seemed it to those men  
About the daïs to abide as then,  
Though one turned o'er his shoulder as he went,  
And saw how Aspak unto Gudrun leant  
And nodded head at Bodli, and meanwhile  
Thrust his forefinger with a mocking smile  
At his own breast ; but Gudrun saw him not,  
Though their eyes met, nay, rather scarce had got  
A thought of Bodli in her heart, for still  
'Kiartan come back again,' her soul did fill,  
'And I shall see him soon, with what changed eyes !'

And now did night o'er the world's miseries  
Draw her dark veil, yet men with stolen light  
Must win from restless day a restless night ;  
Then Gudrun 'gan bestir her, with a smile  
Talking of common things a little while,  
For Bodli to his seat had come again  
And sat him down, though labour spent in vain  
It was to speak to him ; dull the night went,  
And there the most of men were well content  
When bed-time came at last. Then one by one

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

They left the hall till Bodli sat alone  
Within the high-seat. No thought then he had  
Clear to himself, except that all was bad  
That henceforth was to come to him ; the night  
Went through its changes, light waned after light,  
Until but one was left far down the hall  
Casting a feeble circle on the wall,  
Making the well-known things as strange as death ;  
Then through the windows came the night's last  
breath,

And 'gainst the yellow glimmer they showed blue  
As the late summer dawn o'er Iceland drew ;  
And still he sat there, noting nought at all  
Till at his back he heard a light footfall,  
And fell a-trembling, yet he knew not why ;  
Nor durst he turn to look, till presently  
He knew a figure was beside him, white  
In the half dusk of the departing night,  
For the last light had died ; therewith he strove  
To cry aloud, and might not, his tongue clove  
Unto his mouth, no power he had to stand  
Upon his feet, he might not bring his hand,  
How much soe'er he tried, to his sword's hilt ;  
It seemed to him his sorrow and his guilt  
Stood there in bodily form before his eyes,  
Yet, when a dreadful voice did now arise  
He knew that Gudrun spake :

“I came again  
Because I lay awake, and thought how men  
Have told of traitors, and I needs must see  
How such an one to-night would look to me.

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Night hides thee not, O Bodli Thorleikson,  
Nor shall death hide from thee what thou hast done.  
—What!—thou art grown afraid, thou tremblest then  
Because I name death, seed of fearless men?  
Fear not, I bear no sword, Kiartan is kind,  
He will not slay thee because he was blind  
And took thee for a true man time a-gone.  
—My curse upon thee! Knowst thou how alone  
Thy deed hath made me? Dreamest thou what pain  
Burns in me now when he has come again?  
Now, when the longed-for sun has risen at last  
To light an empty world whence all has passed  
Of joy and hope—great is thy gain herein!  
A bitter broken thing to seem to win,  
A soul the fruit of lies shall yet make vile;  
A body for thy base lust to defile,  
If thou durst come anigh me any more,  
Now I have curst thee, that thy mother bore  
So base a wretch among good men to dwell,  
That thou mightst build me up this hot-walled hell.  
—I curse thee now, while good and evil strive  
Within me, but if longer I shall live  
What shall my curse be then? myself so curst,  
That nought shall then be left me but the worst,  
That God shall mock himself for making me.”

Breathless she stopped, but Bodli helplessly  
Put forth his hands till he gained speech, and said  
In a low voice, “Would God that I were dead!  
And yet a word from him I hope to have  
Kinder than this before I reach the grave!”

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“Yea, he is kind, yea, he is kind!” she cried,  
“He loveth all, and casts his kindness wide  
Even as God; nor loves me more than God  
Loves one amongst us crawlers o’er earth’s sod.  
And who knows how I love him? how I hate  
Each face on which he looks compassionate!  
—God help me! I am talking of my love  
To thee! and such a traitor I may prove  
As thou hast, ere the tale is fully done.”

She turned from him therewith to get her gone,  
But lingered yet, as waiting till he spake.  
Day dawned apace, the sparrows ’gan to wake  
Within the eaves; the trumpet of the swan  
Sounded from far; the morn’s cold wind, that ran  
O’er the hall’s hangings, reached her unbound hair,  
And drave the night-gear round her body fair,  
And stirred the rushes by her naked feet:  
Most fair she was—their eyes a while did meet,  
In a strange look, he rose with haggard face  
And trembling lips, that body to embrace,  
For which all peace for ever he had lost,  
But wildly o’er her head her arms she tossed,  
And with one dreadful look she fled away  
And left him ’twixt the dark night and the day,  
’Twixt good and ill, ’twixt love and struggling hate,  
The coming hours of restless pain to wait.

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

### *The Yule-feast at Bathstead*

NOW the days wore, and nowise Kiartan stirred,  
Or seemed as he would stir, and no man heard  
Speech from him of the twain, for good or ill;  
Yet was his father Olaf anxious still,  
And doubted that the smouldering fire might blaze,  
For drearly did Kiartan pass his days  
After a while, and ever silently  
Would sit and watch the weary sun go by,  
Feeling as though the heart in him were dead.

Kálf Asgeirson came to the Peacock's stead  
With Refna, more than once that autumn-tide;  
And at the last folk 'gan to whisper wide  
That she was meet for him, if any one  
Might now mate Kiartan, since Gudrun was gone.  
If Kiartan heard this rumour I know not,  
But Refna heard it and her heart waxed hot  
With foolish hopes; for one of those she was  
Who seem across the weary earth to pass,  
That they may show what burden folk may bear  
Of unrequited love, nor drawing near  
The goal they aim at, die amidst the noise  
Of clashing lusts with scarce-complaining voice.  
God wot that Kiartan in his bitter need  
To her kind eyes could pay but little heed;  
Yet did he note that she looked kind on him,  
Nor yet had all his kindness grown so dim

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

That he might pass her by all utterly,  
And thereof came full many a biting lie.

Now as the time drew on toward Yule once more,  
Did Oswif send, as his wont was of yore,  
To bid the men of Herdholt to the feast ;  
And howso things had changed, both most and least  
Gan make them ready, all but Kiartan, who  
That morn went wandering aimless to and fro  
Amid the bustling groups, and spake no word.  
To whom came Olaf when thereof he heard,  
And spake with anxious face : “ O noble son,  
Wilt thou still harbour wrath for what is done ?  
Nay, let the past be past ; young art thou yet,  
And many another honour mayst thou get,  
And many another love.”

Kiartan turned round,  
And said, “ Yea, good sooth, love doth much abound  
In this kind world ! Lo ! one more loved my love  
Than I had deemed of—thus it oft shall prove ! ”

So spake he sneering and high-voiced, then said,  
As he beheld his father’s grizzled head  
And puckered brow : “ What wouldst thou, father ? see  
Here in thy house do I sit quietly,  
And let all folk live even suchlike life  
As they love best ; and wilt thou wake up strife ? ”

“ Nay, nay, son ; but thou knowest that thy mood,  
So lonely here, shall bring thee little good ;  
Thy grief grows greater as thou nursest it,  
Nor ’neath thy burden ever shalt thou sit

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

As it increases on thee ; then shall come  
A dreadful tale on this once happy home.  
Come rather, show all men thou wilt have peace  
By meeting them, and it shall bring thee ease,  
That sight once over, to think how thou art  
A brave man still, not sitting with crushed heart  
Amid the stirring world."

Then Kiartan gazed  
Long on his father, as a man amazed,  
But said at last : " Ah, thou must have thy will !  
God wot I looked that the long days would kill  
This bitter longing, if unfed it were  
By sights and sounds. Now let the long days bear  
Their fated burden ! I will go with thee."

So like a dreaming man did Kiartan see  
That place which once seemed holy in his eyes ;  
No cry of fury to his lips did rise  
When o'er the threshold first he went, and saw  
Bodli the son of Thorleik towards him draw,  
Blood-red for shame at first, then pale for shame,  
As from his lips the old kind speeches came,  
And hand met hand. Coldly he spake, and said :

" Be merry, Bodli ; thou art nobly wed !  
Thou hadst the toil, and now the due reward  
Is fallen to thee."

Then, like a cutting sword,  
A sharp pain pierced him, as he saw far off  
Gudrun's grey eyes turn, with a spoken scoff,  
To meet his own ; and there the two men stood,  
Each knowing somewhat of the other's mood,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Yet scarce the master-key thereto ; still stared  
Kiartan at Gudrun ; and his heart grew hard  
With his despair : but toward him Bodli yearned,  
As one who well that bitter task had learned ;  
And now he reached once more to him his hand,  
But moveless for a while did Kiartan stand,  
And had in heart to get him back again :  
Yet with strong will he put aback his pain,  
And passed by Bodli, noting him no whit,  
And coldly at the feast that day did sit,  
In outward seeming ; and Gudrun no less  
Sat in her place in perfect loveliness,  
Untouched by passion : Bodli in meanwhile  
From Kiartan's grave brow unto Gudrun's smile  
Kept glancing, and in feverish eager wise  
Strove to pierce through the mask of bitter lies  
That hid the bitter truth ; and still must fear,  
Lest from the feast's noise he a shriek should hear,  
When the thin dream-veil, torn across, should show  
That in the very hell he lay alow.

Men say that when the guests must leave the place,  
Bodli with good gifts many a man did grace,  
And at the last bade bring up to the door  
Three goodly horses such as ne'er before  
Had Iceland seen, and turned his mournful eyes  
To Kiartan's face, stern with the memories  
Of many a past departing, bitter-sweet,  
And said :

“ O cousin, O my friend, unmeet  
Is aught that here I have, for thy great fame,





## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Yet if it please thee still to be the same  
As thou hast been to us, take these of me."

But as men crowded round about to see  
The goodly steeds, spake Kiartan in low voice :  
"Strive not with fate, for thou hast made thy choice ;  
Thy gifts, thy love, may scarce now heal my heart—  
—Look not so kind—God keep us well apart !"

No more they spake as then, but straightway rode  
The Herdholt men unto their fair abode ;  
And so it fell that on the homeward way  
'Gan Olaf to his well-loved son to say :

"Kiartan, howe'er the heart in thee did burn,  
Unto no evil did this meeting turn ;  
Yet would that thou hadst taken gifts from him !  
Now thou wilt go again ?"

"My eyes are dim,  
Belike, O father, with my bitter pain ;  
Yet doubt thou not but I shall go again,  
E'en as I doubt not that fresh misery  
I there shall gather as the days pass by.  
Would I could tell thee all I think, and how  
I deem thy wise hand dreadful seed doth sow !"

### *Kiartan weds Refna*

I THINK that Gudrun on the morrow morn  
Deemed herself yet more wretched and forlorn  
Than e'er before ; I deem that Kiartan woke

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And found it harder yet to bear the yoke  
Than in past days—their eyes had met at last,  
No look of anger from them had been cast  
Sweet words might take away ; no look of woe  
A touch might turn to pleasure, none can know  
But those who know the torturer Love, the bliss  
That heals the stripes those bear who still are his.  
Who knows what tale had been to tell, if she  
Had met his first proud look all tearfully,  
With weak imploring looks? Ah, sore she yearned  
To cry aloud the things that in her burned,  
To cast aside all fear and shame, and kneel  
Before his feet, so she his lips might feel  
Once more as in the old days ; but, alas !  
A wall of shame and wrong betwixt them was,  
Nor could the past deeds ever be undone.

Sometimes it might be when they were alone  
In quiet times—in evening twilight, when  
Far off and softened came the voice of men ;  
Or, better yet, the murmur of the sea  
Smote on the hearts of either peacefully,  
Each to each kind would seem ; until there came  
The backward rush of pain and bitter blame  
Unanswerable, cold, blighting, as the sea,  
Let in o'er flowers—"Why didst thou so to me,  
To me of all the world? while others strove  
We looked to hold the sweetness of our love,  
Yea, if earth failed beneath our feet—and now  
How is the sweet turned bitter!—yea, and thou  
Art just so nigh to me, that still thou art  
A restless anguish to my craving heart."

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Take note too midst all this, that Gudrun heard  
Rumoured about this added bitter word,  
That Refna, Asgeir's daughter, looked to wear  
The coif the Norway queen had meant for her,  
When Kiartan left that broken heart behind ;  
For that tale too her hungry ears must find.  
Then would she clean forget all other woe,  
In thinking how she dreamed the days would go,  
That while she waited doubting nought of him ;  
Then would the past and future wax all dim  
In brooding o'er that unaccomplished bliss,  
In moaning to herself, 'twixt kiss and kiss  
The things she would have said, in picturing,  
As in the hopeful time, how arms would cling  
About her, and sweet eyes, unsatisfied  
E'en with the fulness of all bliss, would hide  
No love from her—and she forgot those eyes  
What they were now, all dulled with miseries ;  
And she forgot the sorrow of the heart  
That fate and time from hers had thrust apart.  
Still wrong bred wrong within her, day by day  
Some little speck of kindness fell away,  
Till in her heart naked desire alone  
Was left, the one thing not to be undone.  
Then would the jealous flame in such wise burn  
Within her, that to Bodli would she turn,  
And madden him with fond caressing touch  
And tender word ; and he, worn overmuch  
With useless striving, still his heart would blind,  
Unto the dread awaking he should find.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Doubt not, that of this too had Kiartan heard,  
If nought but idle babbling men had stirred,  
But more there was ; for the fierce-hearted fools,  
The sons of Oswif, made these twain their tools  
To satisfy their envious hate ; for they  
Waxed eviller-hearted as day followed day,  
Grudging the Peacock's house its luck and fame ;  
And when into their household Bodli came,  
In such wise as ye know, with hate and scorn,  
Which still they had, of his grave face and worn,  
A joy began to mingle presently,  
A thought that they through him might get to see  
Herdholt beneath their feet in grief and shame ;  
So cunningly they turned them to the game  
As such men will, and scattered wide the seeds,  
Lies, and words half-true, of the bitterest deeds.  
For doubt not, kindly-natured though he were,  
That Kiartan too was changing : who would hear  
Such things as once he heard, from one who went  
'Twixt the two houses, with no ill intent,  
But blabbing and a fool, well stuffed with lies,  
At Ospak's hands—for in most loving wise  
The new-wed folk lived now, he said ; soon too  
He deemed would Bodli draw to him a crew,  
And take ship for the southlands : " Nought at all  
Was talked of last night in the Bathstead hall,  
But about England and King Ethelred."

" Well, and was Gudrun merry ? " Haldor said,  
Yet stammered saying it, 'neath Kiartan's frown,  
Who cleared his brow though, nor e'en looked adown

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

As the man answered, smiling, pleased to show  
That he somewhat of great folk's minds did know :

“Yea, marry, was she merry. Good cause why,  
For she will go with Bodli certainly,  
And win such fame as women love to do ;  
Ye well may wot he saith no nay thereto  
If she but ask him ; they sat hand in hand  
As if no folk were left in all the land  
Except themselves.”

He stayed his talk hereat,  
For men looked strangely on him as he sat  
Smiling and careless, casting words that bit  
Like poisoned darts : no less did Kiartan sit  
With unchanged face, nor rose to go away,  
Yea, even strove within himself to say :  
“Good luck go with them ! mine she cannot be,  
May she be happy, here, or over sea !  
Why should I wish aught ill on them to fall ?”

And yet, indeed, a flood of bitterest gall  
Swept o'er his heart ; despite himself he thought :  
“So now, to lonely ways behold me brought,  
She will not miss me more—so change the days,  
And Bodli's loving looks and Bodli's praise  
Shall be enough for her. I am alone,  
And ne'er shall be aught else—would I were gone  
From where none need me now—belike my fame  
Shall be forgotten, wrapped in Bodli's name,  
E'en as my kisses on the lips, that once  
Trembled with longing through the change of suns—

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Those years in Norway shall be blotted out  
From song and story—yea, or men shall doubt  
If I or Bodli there that praise did win—  
What say I, for I deem that men begin  
To doubt if e'er I loved my love at all!"

So thought he, mid the clamour of the hall,  
Where few men knew his heart, but rather thought  
That he began now somewhat to be brought  
From out his gloom; withal, time wore away,  
And certainly as day comes after day,  
So change comes after change in minds of men;  
So otherwise he 'gan to be, than when  
In early days his pain, nigh cherished, clung  
Unto his wounded heart; belike it stung  
Bitterer at whiles, now that he knew his life,  
And hardened him to meet the lingering strife  
'Gainst the cold world that would not think of him  
Too much. The kindness of old days waxed dim  
Within his heart; he hearkened when men spake  
Hard things about his love, for whose dear sake  
Had fame once seemed so light a thing to win.  
A blacker deed now seemed his fellow's sin  
When lesser seemed the prize that it did gain;  
Little by little from his bitter pain  
Fell off the softening veil of tenderness;  
Moody and brooding was he none the less,  
And all the world, with all its good and ill,  
Seemed nothing meet to move his sluggish will.

And now a whole long year had passed, since he  
Stood wildered by the borders of the sea

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

'Neath his first sorrow. Herdholt late had seen  
A noble feast, and thereat had there been  
Among the guests Refna, the tender maid ;  
Gentle of mood, and pale, with head down-weighed  
She sat amidst the feast ; and Kiartan saw  
That much she changed as he anigh did draw,  
That her eyes brightened, and a sprightlier grace  
Came o'er her lips, and colour lit her face.  
And so when all the guests therefrom were gone,  
Thurid, his sister, sat with him alone  
Close upon sunset ; thoughtful now was she,  
He gayer than it was his wont to be,  
And many things he spake to her ; at last  
The absent look from off her face she cast,  
For she had listened little ; and she said ;  
"Yea, brother, is she not a lovesome maid ?"

He started : "Who ?" he said, "I noted not."

She smiled ; "Nay, then is beauty soon forgot ;  
Yet if I were a man, not old or wise,  
Methinks I should remember wide grey eyes,  
Lips like a scarlet thread, skin lily-white,  
Round chin, smooth brow 'neath the dark hair's delight,  
Fair neck, slim hands, and dainty limbs, well hid,  
Since unto most of men doth fate forbid  
To hold them as their own."

A dark cloud spread  
O'er Kiartan's face : "Sister, forbear," he said ;  
"I am no lover, unto me but nought  
Are these things grown."

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Nigher her face she brought  
To his, and said: "And yet were I a man,  
And noted how the love of me began  
To move within the heart of such a maid  
As Refna is, not soon her face would fade  
From out my memory."

"Nay, nay, nay, thou sayst  
Fools' words," he said, "and every word dost waste;  
Who shall love broken men like unto me?"

And therewithal he sprang up angrily  
And would be gone: she stayed him: "Were it so  
That over well she loved; what wouldst thou do?"

"What should I do?" he said; "I have no heart  
To give away, let her e'en act my part  
And find the days right dreary, yet live on."

"Methinks," she said, "the end will soon be won  
For her, poor maid! surely she waneth fast."

And Thurid sighed withal; but Kiartan passed  
Swiftly away from her: and yet he went  
Unto his bed that night less ill content,  
And ere he slept, of Ingibiorg he thought,  
And all the pleasure her sweet love had brought  
While he was with her; and this maid did seem  
Like her come back amidst a happy dream.  
The next morn came, and through his dreariness  
A sweet thought somewhat did his heart caress;  
Howe'er he put it from him, back it came  
Until it gathered shape, and took the name



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Of pity, and seemed worthy to be nursed.

So wore the days, and life seemed not so cursed  
With this to think of—this so set apart  
From all the misery that wrung his heart ;  
Until the sweet ruth grew, until he deemed  
That yet perchance her love was only dreamed,  
That she was heart-whole, yea, or loved indeed  
But for another man was in such need :  
And at that thought blank grew the world again,  
And his old pain was shot across with pain  
As woof hides warp. Ah, well ! what will you have ?  
This was a man some shreds of joy to save  
From out the wreck, if so he might, to win  
Some garden from the waste, and dwell therein.  
And yet he lingered long, or e'er he told  
His heart that it another name might hold  
With that of the lost Gudrun. Time and sight  
Made Refna's love clear as the noonday light ;  
Yea, nowise hard it was for him to think  
That she without this joy would quickly sink  
Into death's arms—and she, she to fade thus,  
God's latest marvel ! eyes so piteous  
With such sweet longing, midst her beauty rare,  
As though they said, " Nought worthy thee is here,  
Yet help me if thou canst : yet, if I die,  
Like sweet embalmment round my heart shall lie  
This love, this love, this love I have for thee ;  
Look once again before thou leavest me ! "

She died not wholly joyless ; they were wed,  
When twenty changing moons their light had shed

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

On the dark waves of Burgfirth, since in trust  
Of Gudrun's love, over the bridge new thrust  
From out the ship, the much-praised Kiartan ran.  
So strangely shift men's lives in little span.

*The Sword comes back without the Scabbard*

WHEN of this wedding first came tidings true  
To Bathstead, then it was that Gudrun knew  
How much of hope had been before that day  
Within her heart; now, when a castaway  
Upon the lonely rocks of life, she was  
With nought to help whate'er might come to pass;  
Deaf, dumb, and blind, long hours she went about  
Her father's house, till folk began to doubt  
If she would ever speak a word again;  
Nay, scarce yet could she think about her pain,  
Or e'en know what it was, but seemed to face  
Some huge blank wall within a lonely place.  
And Bodli watched her with a burning heart,  
Baffled and beaten back, yet for his part  
Something like hope 'gan flit before his eyes,  
Hope of some change e'en if new miseries  
Wrapped it about.

As on a day she went  
Slow-footed through the hall without intent,  
Taking no heed of aught, of Kiartan's name  
She heard one speak, and to her stunned heart came  
A flash of hope and pain, against her will  
Her foot must stay her, and she stood there still,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And turning round she saw where Ospak stood,  
And slowly talking in a sullen mood  
Unto his brother Thorolf; but they made  
As though they saw her not, and Ospak said:

“Thou art young, Thorolf, and thy words are vain,  
So it has been, so it shall be again,  
One man shall deem all others made for him,  
And 'neath his greatness shall all fame grow dim;  
Till on a day men try if he is man—  
Eh! what then falleth—let him, if he can,  
Play Thor among the mannikins, and cast  
The swords aback when he is caught at last.”

“Hist!” Thorolf said; “there sister Gudrun goes!  
Kiartan has froze her heart up: stand we close!”

Then Ospak laughed: “She will not hear us yet,  
She hath a hope she cannot quite forget,  
That he who twice has flung her love aside,  
Will come some day to claim her as his bride,  
When he has slain our long-faced champion there!  
Good sooth, the house of Hauskuld waxeth fair,  
We shall have kings in Iceland ere our day  
Is quite gone by.”

Slowly she gat away  
Stung to the heart by those coarse words of hate,  
Wondering withal what new thought lay in wait  
To change her life; she sat her down alone  
And covered up her face, and one by one  
Strove to recall the happy days gone by,  
And wondering why they passed so happily

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

While yet none strove for happiness ; at last  
She raised her head up and a glance she cast  
Unto the open door, and down the hall  
A streak of sun on Bodli's head did fall  
As he turned round and saw her ; then she said  
Unto herself : " Nay, then, love is not dead  
Since Bodli lives : why should I hate him then  
Because he heeded not the shame of men  
Amidst his love ? but thou, I once called love,  
On whom I flung my heart, with whom I strove  
For ever, thy weak measured love to make  
Equal to mine, what didst thou for my sake ?  
Thy soul is saved, thy fame is won, and thou  
Hast a fair damsel's arms about thee now—  
Not mine—and thou art happy. Who can tell,  
O Bodli Thorleikson, but down in hell  
We twain shall love, and love, and love again,  
When the first wave of the eternal pain  
Has washed our folly from us, and I know  
Why upon earth I loved a weak heart so  
That loved me not, while I was ice to thee,  
O loving lovesome traitor."

Wearily

She hung her head with parted lips awhile,  
Silent she sat, until a bitter smile  
Bemocked her face : " Yet if I call thee love,  
And kiss thee with sweet kisses, such as move  
Great men to great deeds, trust me not too much,  
But think of honied words and tremulous touch  
As things that slay. If Kiartan lay there dead,  
How I should love him ! "

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Once more sank her head,  
And long she sat in silence, till at last  
She heard how Bodli toward her bower passed,  
And rose and met him coldly, with no sign  
That anywise her vexed heart did incline  
To ease the bitter burden that he bore.

Unheeding all, the year moved as before,  
And autumn came again. What hearts soe'er  
The younger folk each unto each might bear  
Olaf and Oswif chose to shut their eyes,  
And close their ears, as peaceful men and wise,  
And make believe that nought amiss there was  
'Twixt the two houses; so it came to pass  
That Bathstead to the Herdholt feast did go  
At autumn-tide once more at least; and though  
Kiartan was loth enow those folk to face,  
Yet so hard Olaf prayed that he would grace  
His father's house with his great fame, and sit,  
Yet once again while he might look at it,  
A glory to the feast, that he put by  
His doubts once more, and there with troubled eye  
Noted the twain among the Bathstead crowd,  
And Oswif's ill sons, insolent and loud,  
And turned pale when the words of greeting came  
From out his lips. Meanwhile, with shrinking shame  
And anxious heart, did Refna gaze upon  
Gudrun's great beauty, deeming she had won  
A troublous lot; and Kiartan, noting that,  
And how scarce like the mistress there she sat,  
Yet to his eyes seemed fairer, because love

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Had forged the fear that so her heart did move,  
Grew wroth that still so many memories  
Must vex his heart, and turn aside his eyes  
To Gudrun, the world's wonder there, whose face,  
Now coldly watchful, scanned the busy place.

Men say that at this feast three things betid,  
Whereby the flame the elders deemed well hid,  
Showed through the heap of smouldering love and hate.  
First, when the new-come guests did stand and wait  
Till they were marshalled to their seats, the maid  
Who did this for the women turned and said  
To Kiartan, "Who the high-seat fills to-day  
Beside the goodwife?"

In most bright array  
Stood Gudrun, gazing ever at the bride,  
As though she saw not anything beside;  
And Kiartan noted her, and therewith deemed  
That in her eyes a look of hate there gleamed,  
And saw withal Refna's soft eyes fall down  
Before hers; then he spake out, with a frown:

"Nay, thou art foolish, damsel: who shall sit  
In the best place, if I may deal with it,  
Saving my wife?" But as he said the word,  
The struggling devil so his vexed heart stirred,  
That he must look at Gudrun; their eyes met,  
Paler she grew than he had seen her yet,  
Then red as blood; but he waxed wroth and said:

"Ah, wert thou e'en so foolish, then, O maid?  
For such a guest belike we have got here

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

As thinketh everything of great or dear,  
Honour, and hearts of men, and women's tears  
Are but for her." Then tingling took the ears  
Of those that stood thereby; as he strode off,  
Gudrun's cold smile was bitterer than a scoff  
Spoken aloud: but Ospak laughed, and said  
In a loud whisper, close to Bodli's head:

"Nay, thou shalt have to fight for Gudrun yet,  
Even though Refna did the bride-bed get.  
He deems our sister may not quench the thought  
Of all the joy she erst to Herdholt brought.  
Ah, we shall yet see Refna lie a-cold,  
Brother-in-law, unless thou waxest bold."

Such a beginning to the feast there was.

Moreover, the next day it came to pass,  
As folk ere supper sported in the hall,  
That unto her did goodwife Thorgerd call  
The gentle Refna, bidding her as one  
Who well might bid, to do the rich coif on,  
The wonder of the Greeks, the fair queen's gift:  
Then Refna reddened, and her eyes did lift  
To Kiartan, e'en as asking him thereof;  
But he spake nought, her soft look might not move  
His heart from deep thought; so she went her ways,  
Scarce happy 'neath his far-off moody gaze,  
And came back glittering like a new-born star,  
And sat upon the daïs seen afar  
Down the dusk hall. Then Ospak noted how

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Gudrun turned pale, and he his teeth did show  
Like a crossed hound, and muttered :

“ Past belief,  
As men may deem it, sister, yet a thief  
Asgeir begat ; for 'longeth not that gold  
To Bathstead, if the tale be rightly told ? ”

Now Kiartan seemed to wake as from a dream,  
When in the torches' flare that gold did gleam,  
And went across to Refna's side, and said,  
Smiling and whispering : “ More I love thy head  
Uncovered, O my love ; yea, and withal,  
Sharp swords thy helm from out their sheaths may call.  
Look down there, how the sons of Oswif scowl  
Around poor Bodli's face ; the storm doth growl  
Afar already—nay, nay, fear thee nought !—  
But good I deemed if thou shouldst know my thought.”

Sour and sick-hearted Gudrun turned away,  
Noting how Kiartan's hand on Refna's lay,  
And how their cheeks were close each unto each.  
And Refna's eyes that love did so beseech,  
Her soft mouth, tremulous with longing sore  
For yet more kisses, long time hung before  
Her weary eyes upon that weary night,  
Yea, and till mirth of men was slain by light.

Hearken once more : the morn the guests should go,  
About the stead Kiartan went to and fro,  
Busied in such things, as his father's son,  
For honour's very sake, must see well done ;  
And as he ordered how the folk should ride,



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

His sword, "The King's Gift" named, which by his side  
Was ever wont to hang, upon his bed  
He left awhile, and, when the guests were sped,  
Came back to seek the same, and found it gone.  
Then questioning there was of everyone,  
And mighty trouble; An the Black meanwhile,  
A sturdy house-carle, slipped out with a smile,  
Just as old Olaf to his son 'gan talk  
In such wise:

"Son, hate far abroad will walk  
E'en when new-born, although we nurse it not:  
Now my heart tells me much must be forgot,  
Many words hidden, many sights be seen  
By thine eyes only, son, if I, between  
Death and the end of life shall see thee last,  
And hold thy living hands as life goes past,  
Mine eyes a-waxing dim: wait then, and hope:  
Thou shalt grow stronger with the world to cope,  
If thou sitt'st down with patience, casting not  
Long days and sweet on drawing of a lot."

Such things and more he spake, and Kiartan heard  
With kind eyes, if his heart were little stirred.  
But, as they sat and talked thereof, came back,  
Smiling, but panting sorely, An the Black,  
And in his cloak he carried something wrapped.

"Well," Olaf said, "and what new thing hath  
happened?"

"Soon told," said An; "I followed them afar,  
Knowing what thieves those Bathstead skinkers are,  
And at the peat moss where the road doth wind

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

About the dale, young Thorolf lagged behind ;  
I saw him take a something from his cloak,  
And thrust it down just where the stream doth soak  
The softest through the peat ; then swift again  
Ride on : so when they might not see me plain,  
O ho, says I, and comes up to the place,  
And here and there I peer with careful face  
Until at last I draw this fair thing forth ;  
—A pity though, the scabbard is of worth !  
Clean gone it is.”

Then from his cloak he drew  
“The King’s Gift” bright and naked. Olaf grew  
Joyous thereover, praising An right well.  
But Kiartan ’gan to gloom : “Ah, who can tell,”  
He muttered, as he took the sword to him,  
“But this shall end the troublous tale and dim?—  
Well, I at least cast not the sheath away ;  
Bewail not ye too much, who have to pay  
For pleasure gained ; his may the worst hap be,  
Who best can bear the pain and misery.”

### *The Stealing of the Coif*

NOW howso Olaf bade An hold his peace,  
And Kiartan promised he would nowise cease  
To show a good face to the world on all  
That ’twixt the houses yet might chance to fall,  
Certain it is, that ere long, far and wide  
The tale was known, throughout the country-side ;  
Nay, more than this, to Kiartan’s ears it came

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

That Oswif's sons deemed they had cast a shame  
On Herdholt, and must mock him openly  
And call him "Mire-blade," e'en when those were by  
Who held him of the most account; no less  
Kiartan was moved not from his quietness,  
Nor did aught hap 'twixt autumn and Yule-tide;  
Then men at Herdholt busied them to ride  
To Bathstead once again, and Olaf said:

"Wilt thou once more be guided by my head,  
Son Kiartan, and with brave heart go to face  
The troublous things that wait thee in that place?"

"Well," Kiartan said, "if so I deemed, that fate  
Might be turned back of men, or foolish hate  
Die out for lack of fuel, no more would I  
Unto the Bathstead hall-door draw anigh;  
But forasmuch as now I know full well,  
That the same story there shall be to tell  
Whether I go, or whether I refrain,  
Let all be as thou wilt; and yet we twain  
Not oft again, O father, side by side  
Unto this merry-making place shall ride."

Then Olaf sighed, as though indeed he knew  
To what an end his latter days now drew.

So now all folk were ready there, but when  
The women came their ways to meet the men,  
Said Thorgerd unto Refna: "Well, this tide  
Thou hast the coif, no doubt, and like a bride  
Hast heart to look midst those whose hearts are cold  
To thee and thine."

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then Refna did behold  
Thorgerd's stern face in trembling wise, and said :  
"Nay, goodwife, what fair cloth may coif my head  
Shall matter little midst the many things  
Men have to talk of : rise and fall of kings  
And changes of the world : within my chest  
The coif lies."

"There," said Kiartan, "might it rest  
For thee and me, sweet ; yet I mind indeed  
When I, a froward child, deemed I had need  
Of some sharp glittering thing, as axe or knife,  
But little would my mother raise up strife  
With me therefor, and even as I would  
I cut myself : so if she think this good  
Let fetch the Queen's Gift."

Refna looked adown  
Shamefaced and puzzled, Thorgerd with a frown  
Turned upon Kiartan, but he smiled in turn,  
And said : "Yea, mother, let the red gold burn  
Among the lights at Bathstead ; great am I  
E'en as thou deem'st ; and men must let pass by  
Their hatred to me, whatso say their hearts ;  
Come, open-handed let us play our parts."

So was the coif brought, and once more they rode  
Unto the door of Oswif's fair abode ;  
And there they feasted merrily enow—  
—Such of them as were fools, or cared not how  
The next week went—and at the highest tide  
Of all the feast, sat Refna as a bride  
Coifed with the Queen's Gift ; Gudrun stern and cold,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Scarce would the tender face of her behold,  
Or cast a look at Kiartan ; rather she  
Did press the hand of Bodli lovingly,  
Softening her face for him alone of all :  
Then would strange tumult on his spirit fall,  
Mingled of pain and uttermost delight,  
To think the whole world had so swerved from right  
To give him pleasure for a little while,  
Nor durst he look upon his old friend's smile,  
Who glad with his own manhood seemed to be  
Once more, once more the brave heart frank and free ;  
As though at last the trouble and the coil  
That wrapped him round, and made him sadly toil  
Through weary days, had fallen all clean away,  
And smiling he might meet the bitterest day.

So passed the high-tide forth unto its end,  
But when at last folk from the place would wend,  
And Refna fain would have the coif of her  
Whose office was to tend the women's gear—  
—Lo, it was gone—then Refna trembled sore,  
And passing through the crowd about the door  
Whispered to Kiartan ; Ospak stood anigh  
And bit his lips, and watched her eagerly,  
And Kiartan with a sidelong glance could see  
His colour come and go, and cried :

“ Let be,  
Light won, light gone ! if still it is 'bove ground,  
Doubt thou not, Refna, it shall yet be found.”

Folk looked on one another ; Thorgerd said,  
Turning on Gudrun : “ Small account is made

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Of great folk's gifts, then ; I have seen the day  
When Egil's kin a man or two would slay  
For things less worth than this."

Her angry frown  
Gudrun met calmly : " Was the thing his own ?  
Then let him do e'en as he will with it ;  
Small loss it is methinks for her to sit  
Without his old love's gift upon her head ! "

Ere Thorgerd answered, Kiartan cried, and said :  
" Come swift to saddle ! Cousin, ride with me,  
Until we turn the hill anigh the sea ;  
I fain would speak with thee a word or twain  
That I have striven to think about in vain  
These last days that we met."

Bodli flushed red  
And looked adown : " So be it then," he said.  
Then stammered and turned pale, and said, " Enow  
Shall one sword be to-day betwixt us two ;  
Take thou the rover's weapon, O fair wife."

She looked on him, her lovely face was rife  
With many thoughts, but Kiartan's kindly gaze  
Seemed to bring back the thoughts of happier days  
To both of them, and swift away she passed  
Unto her bower ; and men were horsed at last,  
And sharp the hoofs upon the hard way rung.  
So as into the saddle Kiartan swung,  
He leant toward Ospak, and said mockingly :  
" I love thee—I would not that thou shouldst die ;  
So see me not too oft, because I have

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

A plague sometimes, that bringeth to the grave,  
Those that come nigh me ; live on well and whole ! ”

Then to his face rushed Ospak’s envious soul,  
His hand fell on his sword-hilt as he shrank  
Back to the doorway, while the fresh air drank  
Kiartan’s clear laughter, as their company  
Rode jingling down unto the hoary sea.

But the last smile from off his face was gone,  
When silent, in a while he rode alone  
With Bodli silent : then he said to him :  
“ Thou seest, Bodli, how we twain must swim  
Adown a strange stream—thou art weaponless  
To-day, and certes bides my sword no less  
Within its scabbard—how long shall it last ? ”

Then Bodli cried, “ Until my life is past—  
Shall I take life from thee as well as love ? ”

“ Nay,” Kiartan said, “ be not too sure thereof,  
Bethink thee where by thine own deed thou art  
Betwixt a passionate woman’s hungry heart,  
And the vile envy of a dangerous fool ;  
Doubt not but thou art helpless, and the tool  
Of thy mad love, and that ill comes from ill,  
And as a thing begins, so ends it still—  
—Nay, not to preach to thee I brought thee here,  
Rather to say that the old days are dear,  
Despite of all, unto my weary heart.  
And now methinks from them and thee I part

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

This day ; not unforgiven, whatsoe'er  
Thou at my hands, or I of thine may bear.  
For I too—shall I guide myself indeed,  
Or rather be so driven by hard need  
That still my hand as in a dream shall be,  
While clearly sees the heart that is in me  
Desires I may not try to bring to pass?  
So since no more it may be as it was  
In the past days, when fair and orderly  
The world before our footsteps seemed to lie,  
Now in this welter wherein we are set,  
Lonely and bare of all, deem we not yet  
That each for each these ill days we have made ;  
Rather the more let those good words be weighed  
We spake, when truth and love within us burned,  
Before the lesson of our life was learned.  
What say'st thou ? are the days to come forgiven,  
Shall folk remember less that we have striven,  
Than that we loved, when all the tale is told ? ”

Then long did Bodli Kiartan's face behold,  
Striving for speech : then said, “ Why speak'st thou so ?  
Twice over now I seem my deed to do,  
Twice over strive to wake as from a dream,  
That I, once happy, never real may deem,  
So vile and bitter is it ; may thy sword  
If e'er we meet be sharper than thy word,  
And make a speedy end of doubt and strife ;  
Fear not to take much from me, taking life ! ”

Still seemed the air filled with his words when he  
Turned back to Bathstead, and the murmuring sea



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Seemed from afar to speak of rest from pain.  
Then on a little knoll he shortened rein,  
And turned about, and looking toward the hill  
Beheld the spear of Kiartan glittering still,  
When all the rest of him behind the brow  
Was sunken; but the spear sank quickly now,  
And slowly home withal did Bodli ride,  
E'en as he might the coming end to bide.

### *Refna hears Women talking*

SO the days wore with nothing new to tell,  
Till spring-tide once more on the country fell.  
Then on a night as Kiartan to his bed  
Would go, still Refna sat with bowed-down head  
And stirred not, nor a while would speak, when he  
Spake to her in kind words and lovingly;  
At last she lifted up a face, wherein  
Somewhat did trouble upon sorrow win,  
And said:

“ Indeed of all thy grief I knew,  
But deemed if still thou saw'st me kind and true,  
Not asking too much, yet not failing aught  
To show that not far off need love be sought,  
If thou shouldst need love—if thou sawest all this,  
Thou wouldst not grudge to show me what a bliss  
Thy whole love was, by giving unto me  
As unto one who loved thee silently,  
Now and again the broken crumbs thereof:  
Alas! I, having then no part in love,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Knew not how nought, nought can allay the soul  
Of that sad thirst, but love untouched and whole !  
Kinder than e'er I durst have hoped thou art,  
Forgive me then, that yet my craving heart  
Is so unsatisfied ; I know that thou  
Art fain to dream that I am happy now,  
And for that seeming ever do I strive ;  
Thy half-love, dearest, keeps me still alive  
To love thee ; and I bless it—but at whiles—”

So far she spake till her weak quivering smiles  
Faded before the bitterness of love.  
Her face changed, and her passion 'gan to move  
Within her breast until the sobs came fast,  
And down upon her hands her face she cast,  
And by the pain of tears her heart did gain  
A little respite ; nor might she refrain  
From weeping yet, when Kiartan's arms she felt  
About her, and for long her fair lips dwelt  
With hungry longing on his lips, and he  
Spake to her :

“O poor lover, long may we  
Live upon earth, till lover and beloved  
Each is to each, by one desire moved ;  
And whereas thou dost say to me, Forgive,  
Forgive me rather ! A short while to live  
Once seemed the longest life of man to me,  
Wherein my love of the old years to see ;  
But could I die now, and be born again  
To give my whole heart up to ease thy pain,  
A short while would I choose to live indeed.

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

But is it not so, sweet, that thou hast need  
To tell me of a thing late seen or heard?  
Surely by some hap thy dear heart is stirred  
From out its wonted quiet; ease thine heart,  
And 'twixt us twain thy fear and grief depart!"

She looked up: "Yea, kind love, I thought to tell  
Of no great thing that yesterday befell.  
Why should I vex thee with it? Yet thy fame,  
If I must say the word, in question came  
Therein. Yet prithee, mark it not too much!"

He smiled and said: "Nay, be the tidings such  
As mean my death, speak out and hide not aught!"

She sat a little while, as though she thought  
How best to speak, then said: "The day being good,  
About noon yesterday in peaceful mood  
I wandered by the brook-side, and at last  
Behind a great grey stone myself I cast,  
And slept, as fate would have it; when I woke  
At first I did but note the murmuring brook,  
But as my hearing and my sight did clear  
The sound of women's voices did I hear,  
And in the stream two maidens did I see,  
Our housefolk, and belike they saw not me,  
Since I lay low adown, and up the stream  
Their faces turned; I from a half-sweet dream,  
I know not what, awaked, no sooner heard  
Their first word, than sick-hearted and afeard  
I grew, the cold and evil world to feel;

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So hard it seemed, love, with my life to deal :  
Bitterly clear I saw ; as if alone  
And dead, I saw the world ; by a grey stone  
Within the shallows, washing linen gear  
They stood ; their voices sounded sharp and clear ;  
Half smiles of pleasure and of goodlihead  
Shone on their faces, as their rough work sped ;  
O God, how bright the world was ! ”

A flush came

Across her face ; as stricken by some shame  
She stammered, when she went on : “ Thus their speech,  
Broken amid their work mine ear did reach  
As I woke up to care, for the one said,  
‘ Yea, certes, now has Kiartan good end made  
Of all his troubles, things go well enow.’  
‘ Over well,’ said the other, ‘ didst thou know ?’  
‘ Know what ?’ the first one said. ‘ What knowst thou  
then ?’  
‘ Nay, nought except the certain talk of men.’  
‘ Well, hear I not men too, what wilt thou say ?’  
She said, ‘ Men talk that this is latter May,  
And Kiartan sitteth still and nought is done  
For the two thefts of Bathstead to atone.’  
‘ Fool !’ saith the first one, ‘ shall all fall to strife  
For what in no wise maketh worse their life ?’  
‘ Well, well, and what will Refna say thereto ?  
Things had been otherwise a while ago ;  
Scarce Kiartan’s brother had stripped Gudrun’s head  
Of what she loved, and yet ’scaped lying dead  
By this time. Ospak, sure, is safe enow.’  
‘ Ah !’ said the other, ‘ great things sayest thou !’

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

‘ True words I speak, when this I say to thee,  
That glad would Gudrun and our Kiartan be  
If Bodli Thorleikson and Refna lay  
Dead on the earth upon the selfsame day ;  
And this from all men’s daily talk I draw ;  
*Old friends are lost to sever, saith the saw.*’

“ This was the last word that I heard, O love,  
For from the place softly I ’gan to move  
Ere they might see me, and my feet, well taught  
To know the homeward way, my body brought  
Unto my bower ; yet scarce I saw the way,  
Rather some place beneath the sod, where lay  
A few white bones, unnamed, unheeded, while  
Hard by within this bower ’twixt word and smile  
Was breast strained unto breast of twain I knew—  
—And needs must part awhile, that I might rue  
My life, my death, my bitter useless birth.  
O Kiartan, over-weary seemed the earth  
Yesterday and to-day ; too hard to bear  
Within thine home to be, and see thee near,  
And think that but for very kindness thou  
Must wish me dead—thou didst not note me, how  
My face was worn with woe throughout that tide,  
Though most men looked on me—for thou must bide  
A weary waiting, and thy woe untold  
Must make thy face at whiles seem hard and cold.  
—Ah me ! forgive me that I talk of this !  
Think how my heart ached ! ”

For now kiss on kiss  
Did Kiartan shower upon her quivering face,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Yet, even as their arms did interlace,  
Despite his love and pity, of past years  
He needs must think, of wasted sighs and tears  
And hopes all fallen to nought, and vows undone,  
And many a pleasure from his life seemed gone ;  
And sorely his heart smote him for her faith  
So pure and changeless ; her love strong as death,  
As kind as God, that nought should satisfy  
Till all the shows of earth had passed her by.

*Kiartan fetches the price of the Coif from  
Bathstead*

AND now a day or two with brooding face  
Did Kiartan go about from place to place  
And speak few words to any, till one day  
He bade his men see to their war-array,  
For two hours after midnight all and some  
Into the hall to wait his word should come,  
And whoso blabbed, he said, the deed should rue.  
So thitherward in arms that night they drew ;  
And Refna trembling lay, while Kiartan clad  
His body in the best war-gear he had,  
And through the hangings did she watch the spears,  
And dreadful seemed the laughter to her ears,  
And red the lamps burned, as with twilight grey  
They mingled : then he turned to go away,  
And kissed her as he spake :

“ Refna, this eve,  
Most like, a noble gift shalt thou receive ;

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Do thou thy part to meet it with good grace,  
And gather what thou canst into this place  
Of fiddlers and of glee-men, and with song  
Meet that good gift that comes to heal thy wrong."

Now Refna durst not ask, What wilt thou then,  
And whither go to-night these all-armed men?  
Because she deemed she knew what word it was  
That all this clash of arms had brought to pass.  
And sick at heart she grew to think thereof,  
And with her fair white arms made strong by love  
She clung to Kiartan, but he drew her hold  
With gentle hands from off the mail rings cold,  
And kissed her sweet mouth opened now to speak,  
And gat him gone; and she fell back all weak  
Upon her bed, and lying there alone,  
Saw how his war-gear in the bright light shone,  
And heard his cheery voice as he cried loud,  
"To Bathstead, ho!" and then the noisy crowd  
Passed clashing from the hall, and nothing there  
Within a little while might Refna hear,  
But the dawn's noises, and the loitering tread  
Of some maid getting slowly back to bed;  
So there she lay alone in grief and fear,  
But hope's fresh voice shuddering she needs must hear  
Whispering wild words, yet sweet, of chance and crime,  
Telling the wondrous ways of slowfoot time.

But now at Bathstead ere they rose that morn,  
Men deemed they heard the winding of a horn,  
And, running straightway to the door, could see

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

About the stead a goodly company,  
And there were Olaf's sons with sixty men  
Besetting every gate and door; but when  
The men of Bathstead were all armed and went  
Unto the door, they saw a gay-striped tent  
Just raised upon the slope-side 'gainst the hall,  
And armed men round about it; one man, tall  
Beyond his fellows, stood some yards more near  
The hall-door, leaning on a pennoned spear,  
Clad in a glittering mail-coat, with a shield  
About his neck, where, on a golden field  
The holy Rood of God was painted fair;  
From 'neath his gilded helm his golden hair  
Fell waving down, but hidden were his eyes  
By the wide brim: then did great fear arise  
Within their hearts, despite their fiery hate,  
Because they knew that now at last, if late,  
Was Kiartan's might aroused and in the field.  
But none the less little would Ospak yield  
To any fear; before the rest he strode,  
And cried aloud:

“Within this fair abode  
Has been thy place, O Kiartan Olafson,  
And not without; what ill deed hast thou done  
That father Oswif has forbidden thee  
Thy honoured seat where it was wont to be?”

The tall man moved not, but a deep voice came  
From 'neath his helm: “Thou art right wise to name  
A hidden head; grow wiser! sick am I,  
And somewhat deadly now to come anigh;



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

My sword has lost its scabbard 'gainst my will,  
Beware then, for its naked edge may kill!"

Then Ospak raised the spear in his right hand  
And shook it, but the tall man forth did stand  
And pushed his helm aback and showed the face  
Of Kiartan, and across the grassy space  
Cried mightily: "Be wise, and get ye back!  
Of fighting one day shall ye have small lack;  
But now beware, because my father's sons  
Have sworn to spare no man of you, if once  
A drop of blood is spilt! Come ye not forth  
Until I bid you, if of any worth  
Ye hold your lives; and meantime for the sake  
Of what I had and have not, I will take  
My due from mead and byre."

And therewithal  
He let his helm down o'er his visage fall,  
And turned back toward the tent. Back shrank again,  
Cowed into sullen rage, the Bathstead men,  
And armed but helpless there within the hall  
Silent they sat, hearkening the raiders call  
The cattle o'er the meads: in high seat there  
Sat Bodli, but his visage worn with care  
Of the past days, was sad, but calm and soft,  
As if he thought of gentle things, though oft  
Fierce eyes would scowl upon his dreamy face  
Unnoted of him; in that dreary place  
He seemed like some dead king, condemned in hell  
For his one sin among such men to dwell  
As for their wickedness he hated most  
Ere righteous ways and life and all were lost.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And in meantime, 'twixt silent trembling bower  
And silent cursing hall, hour after hour  
Did Gudrun pace with restless feet, and heart  
Betwixt two nameless miseries torn apart,  
Whence cold despair was being well fashioned now.  
And Oswif sat apart with wrinkled brow,  
Unnoted in that house of grief and wrong.  
But midst their shame, from outside, laugh and song  
Came loud and louder, mingled with the clank  
Of mead-horns; the feast's clamour never sank  
Till mid-day was well passed; then quieter  
It grew without, and yet they still might hear  
Lowling of neat and men's shouts. Then a voice  
Cried from the slope-side:

“Bathstead men, rejoice  
That ye no autumn-feast need hold this year,  
For certes else should ye find victuals dear  
And hard to come by! Oswif's sons, come out,  
Unarmed and peaceable, and have no doubt  
Of hurt from us!”

They stirred not for a space;  
Then cried the voice: “Lives none within the place?  
Are ye all dead of fear? Come out, I say,  
Else o'er your roof the red cock crows to-day!”

Then Ospak, cursing, on the pavement cast  
His shield and spear, and toward the doorway passed,  
And in likewise the others one by one,  
Till Bodli and Gudrun were left alone:  
And then she said, “And thou—wilt thou not go?  
Knowst thou the name of him who shames us so?”

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

“Yea, yea, I know it!” Bodli cried; “farewell!  
Of me, too, shall there be a tale to tell:  
I shall go forth, but not without my sword.”

He drew the thing he named with that last word,  
And ran unto the door; against the wall  
There stood the sons of Oswif, stout and tall,  
Foaming, but helpless: in his saddle now  
Sat Kiartan, unhelmed, his bright hair a-glow  
With the May sun. His brethren stood around  
Beside their horses, and a mighty sound  
Came from the herd of neat that thronged the way  
Beneath the hillside; spears with pennons gay  
Glittered about them in the sunlight fair,  
For Kiartan's company was gathered there  
Ready to set forth.

So there Bodli stood  
One moment, thinking that the world was good,  
Though not for him; then he cried out: “O thou,  
Thou son of Olaf, come and meet me now,  
For long have I been weary of the earth;  
And now to me but one thing seems of worth  
That I should win death of such hands as thine.”

Then in the sunlight did the bright steel shine,  
And Kiartan's brethren soon had ended all,  
For Bodli ran forth; yet heard Kiartan call  
Across the clash of arms: “Nay, point nor edge  
His blood shall redden not; make ye a hedge  
Of your strong shields and thrust him back again  
Since he knows not that all his might is vain,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

E'en to win death ; live, foster-brother, yet,  
And get despite of all, what thou mayst get  
Of joy and honour."

Midway, Bodli stayed,  
And in his hand he poised the heavy blade  
As he would cast it from him, slowly then  
Did he give back face foremost from the men,  
Till in the doorway once again he stood.

Then Kiartan said : " Yea, cousin, it is good,  
If thou must die by me, that thou shouldst bide  
Some noble fight, some glorious reaping-tide,  
Where each of each fair fame at least may gain—  
God grant a little bliss ere that last pain !—  
But hearken, thievish sons of a wise man !  
Be taught, ye blustering fools, if yet ye can !  
From Yule till now I gave you, a long day,  
To pay the debt that needs was ye must pay ;  
Twice-told I take it now, and leave behind  
What shall seem shame indeed to most men's mind.  
—This is my bridal gift, think well of it ;  
In your own fields it waxed, while ye did sit  
Plotting across the mead-horns. Now take heed  
That oft henceforth your manhood shall ye need  
If ye would live in peace. Blow loud and clear,  
O horns, for Refna waiteth for us there,  
And merry shall we be to-night in hall  
What things soever afterwards may fall ! "

Still Bodli stood with drawn sword in the door,  
While midst the clang of arms and horn's loud roar

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

He saw the herd move up the dusty road ;  
He saw how Kiartan for a while abode  
Behind the rest, and stared at the grey stead  
Whose roof so often had been o'er his head ;  
He saw him turn, and well might deem he sighed,  
Then muttered he, " Ah, would God I had died  
By thee to-day ! " and sheathed his sword, and then  
Was hustled by the sullen baffled men  
Who shouldered past him back into the hall,  
Who heeded him just as they did the wall  
Past which they rubbed ; but with the last of these  
He went in, casting by all hope of peace.

But Refna looking from the Herdholt knoll  
That evening, saw a dust-cloud upward roll  
And move toward Herdholt, and her heart beat fast  
When from the midst thereof bright spear-heads passed,  
And then men's helms, and then the guarded herd ;  
And she bethought her of her mate's last word,  
And bade the women in their best array,  
And minstrels, stand on either side the way  
To greet the new-comers, whose horns blew loud  
Close by the garth now, while the beasts 'gan crowd  
About the garth-gate ; so, the gate past through,  
Over the homefield toward the wall they drew,  
Tended by gay-clad men-at-arms, who wore  
About their helms fair flowers that Bathstead bore,  
While of the beasts, sharp horn and curl-browed head,  
And dewlapped neck were well begarlanded.  
Then from the close loud joyful cries arose,  
Tinkle of harps, sharp noise of fiddle-bows,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And all along the line there ran a shout :  
Therewith old Olaf to the door came out,  
And saw his sons swift from the cattle ride,  
Till Kiartan leapt adown by Refna's side  
And cast his arms about her, and 'gan cry :

“Now is the Queen's-Gift paid for fittingly ;  
For these are thine, e'en as my hand and sword,  
To put from thee all care, and every word  
That grieves thee, sweet. O love, but I am gay !  
Sure a fair life beginneth from to-day !”

She gazed at him, and knew not why her heart  
Scarce in that joyous scene might play its part—  
Why it was not enough—these words of love,  
His bright fair face her longing eyes above ?  
Yet with a loving cry she hid her face  
Upon his breast.

Thereat did Olaf gaze  
And muttered low : “A goodly price in sooth  
For a girl's coif ! but yet, for Kiartan's youth,  
For his fair hope and glory, and increase  
Of good deeds, and mine own old age of peace,  
Not too much, not too much ! Ah, woe is me  
That I should live these latter days to see !”

*Thorhalla tells of Kiartan's Comings and Goings*

WHAT should the next move in the strange game  
be ?

Kiartan rode through the country carelessly

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

With few behind him, but nought hitherto  
The sons of Oswif durst against him do,  
While he his hand withheld not utterly  
From them; so doubtful did the days go by.

And Gudrun? Ah, the black spot in her heart  
That rose when first she knew that one had part  
In Kiartan's life, and ever greater grew,  
When of his love toward this new love she knew,  
Now at the last, when over sure she felt  
That she no longer in his memory dwelt,  
O'erspread her life, till from the foiled desire  
Cast back upon her heart, there sprang a fire  
Of very hate: true was it, that at first  
Bodli, herself, and all around she cursed  
Rather than Kiartan—Well, what will you have  
That was ere hope had sunk into his grave,  
While yet some pleasure clung round Kiartan's name.  
Then came the feast at Herdholt; then the shame  
About the coif, and fear of shame again,  
And many a tale told to make over plain  
His love for Refna; then the evil hour,  
When she within the darksome hall must cower  
Among her trembling brethren: then, when she  
Had looked at least a noble death to see  
Of one who loved her, Kiartan sent him back  
A baffled man, as who all might did lack,  
Yea, even the might to die; still, at each turn  
Afresh this weary lesson must she learn;  
With the wrong-doers hast thou taken part,  
Live then, and die with them, for thy love's heart

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Is now no more for thee! still everywhere  
Did Kiartan's image meet her; the warm air  
Of summer seemed but sent her from his hand,  
The sea that beat the borders of the land  
Still seemed to bear his fame unto her feet;  
All summer sights and sounds, and odours sweet,  
Were heavy with his memory: no least way  
To 'scape from thought of him from day to day.  
Withal, the sight of faces dull with hate  
Of that same man, on every step did wait.  
Familiar grew the muttering sullen voice  
Of those who in no goodhap could rejoice,  
Until the very thought and hope of strife,  
The use of hate, must grow to be her life.  
And shaped therefrom a dreadful longing rose,  
That some fell end the weary way would close,  
Unto herself she scarce durst whisper what.

Now on a day three of her brothers sat  
Within the hall, and talked, and she stood by  
Hearkening their eager speech most wearily.  
"The gabbling crone Thorhalla has just been,"  
Said Ospak; "and whom think you she has seen?"

"Nay, by thy scowl I know well," Thorolf said;  
"'Twas Kiartan Olafson, upon my head."

"Well, Thorolf, thou grow'st wise—now, said the  
crone,  
That in her life she ne'er saw such an one  
As Kiartan looked, a loving maiden's dream



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Of a great king, she said, the man did seem.  
‘Well,’ said I, ‘and how long then will it last?’  
‘Ah,’ said the crone, ‘till after ye are passed;  
Why, the whole country-side is ringing now  
With this, that ye had best be wise and bow  
Before him humbly, since most kind is he;  
Kind,’ says the crone, ‘certes he was to me.’  
‘Well, well,’ says I, ‘but these are fools’ words here.’  
‘Nay, let me speak,’ she says, ‘for he will fare  
Unto the west to Knoll; this know I well,  
Because to him therewith I needs must tell  
Of one who owed me half a mark thereby.  
Well, goody, says he, I shall pass anigh,  
And I will fetch it for thee—lo, how kind.’”

“Now may God strike the gabbling idiot blind!”  
Said Thorolf. “Nay,” said Ospak, “not so wise  
Thou growest now; rather, God keep her eyes!  
Tidings she told me, saying he would bide  
For just three days at Knoll, and thence will ride  
Through Swinedale home, close here, nor like that he  
Will ride by us with a great company,  
Say two at most—good luck go with his pride,  
Whereby so fair a chance doth us betide!—  
Bodli shall lead or die.”

Then Gudrun turned  
Sick-hearted from them; how her longing burned  
Within her heart! ah, if he died not now,  
How might she tell whereto his hate would grow?  
Yet a strange hope that longing shot across,  
As she got thinking what would be the loss

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

If Bodli fell 'neath Kiartan's hand. That day,  
Like years long told, past Gudrun wore away,  
She knew not how ; but when the next day came  
She cried aloud, " The same, ah, still the same,  
Shall every day be, now that he is dead ! "   
She started as she heard her voice, her head  
Seemed filled with flame : she crawled unto her bower  
And at her mirrored face hour after hour  
She stared, and wondered what she really was,  
The once-loved thing o'er which his lips would pass.  
Her feet grew heavy at the end of day,  
Her heart grew faint, upon her bed she lay  
Moveless for many an hour, until the sun  
Told her that now the last day was begun ;  
Then she arose as one might in a dream  
To clothe herself, till a great cloud did seem  
To draw away from her ; as in bright hell,  
Sunless but shadowless she saw full well  
Her life that was and would be, now she knew  
The deed unmasked that summer day should do.  
And then she gnashed her teeth and tore her hair,  
And beat her breast, nor lightened thus despair,  
As over and over the sweet names she told  
Whereby he called her in the days of old ;  
And then she thought of Refna's longing eyes,  
And to her face a dreadful smile did rise  
That died amidst its birth, as back again  
Her thoughts went to the tender longing pain  
She once had deemed a sweet fair day would end ;  
And therewith such an agony did rend  
Her body and soul, that all things she forgot

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Amidst of it ; upon the bed she sat  
Rigid and stark, and deemed she shrieked, yet made  
No sound indeed ; but slowly now did fade  
All will away from her, until the sun  
Risen higher, on her moveless body shone,  
And as a smitten thing beneath its stroke  
She shrank and started, and awhile awoke  
To hear the tramp of men about the hall.  
Then did a hand upon the panel fall ;  
And in her very soul she heard the ring  
Of weapons pulled adown, and everything,  
Yea, even pain, was dead a little space.

At last she woke to see the haggard face  
Of Bodli o'er her own : " I go," he said,  
" Would God that thou mayst hear of me as dead  
Ere the sun sets to-day."

She passed her hand  
Across her eyes, as he in arms did stand  
Before her there, and stared but answered not,  
As though indeed his face were clean forgot ;  
Yet her face quickened as his eyes she saw  
So full of ruth yet nigher to her draw :  
She shrank aback, but therewith suddenly  
A thought smote through her, with an angry cry  
She sprang up from the bed, naked and white,  
Her gold hair glittering in the sunshine bright  
That flooded all the place ; his arm she caught  
And stared into his eyes :

" What is thy thought ? "

She said, " why goest thou with these murderous men ?

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Ah! dost thou think thou yet mayst save him then?  
Ah! dost thou think that thou mayst still be kind  
To every one, fool as thou art and blind,  
Yet work thy wicked will to pleasure thee?"

Across her passion he began to see  
That now she doubted him; he muttered low:  
"The work of these my hands what man can know?  
And yet at least the end shall be to-day."

She fell aback nor noted more, but lay  
All huddled up upon the bed, her hair  
O'er her white body scattered here and there,  
And as he gazed on her he saw she wept,  
And a wild passion o'er his heart there swept,  
And twice he stretched his arms out, to embrace  
His curse and his delight, twice turned his face  
Unto the door that led unto the hall,  
Then with a cry upon her did he fall  
And, sobbing, strained her to his mail-clad breast,  
And to her writhen lips his lips he pressed,  
And moaned o'er her wet cheeks, and kissed her eyes  
That knew him not; till in his heart 'gan rise,  
Now at the last, a glory in his shame,  
A pride to take the whole world's bitter blame;  
And like a god he felt, though well he deemed  
That to an end at last his dream was dreamed.  
And she, she knew him not, her arms fell down  
Away from him, her drawn mouth and set frown  
Were not for him, she did not shrink from him,  
She turned not round to curse or bless, when dim

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

She lay before his burning eyes once more,  
Her long hair gilding the white bed-clothes o'er,  
As midst low restless moaning there she tossed.

Wildly he cried : " Oh, Gudrun, thou hast lost,  
But look on me for I have never won ! "   
Then from the place he rushed, and with the sun  
Burst into the dusk hall, a stream of light,  
Neath his dark hair, his face so strange and white  
That a dead man dragged up into the day  
By wizard's arts he seemed to be, and they  
Who waited armed there, and the last cup drank,  
Looked each at each, and from his presence shrank.

For there were gathered now the murderous band,  
Long to be cursed thereafter through the land,  
Gudrun's five brethren, and three stout men more.  
Then Ospak cried, " Soon shall our shame be o'er,  
And thou and we shall be great men and famed,  
And Bathstead free ; come now, since thou art named  
Our leader, husband of Gudrun, lead forth !  
For this day shall be called a day of worth,  
By those that tell the story of our house."

Flushed were the men, and fierce and boisterous,  
And Bodli trembled in his helpless rage  
To be among them, but his sin's strong cage  
Was strait and strong about him : with no word  
He girt to him the rover's deadly sword,  
And did his helm on : and so forth they wend  
Through the bright morn to bring about the end.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

### *The Slaying of Kiartan Olafson*

NOW Kiartan rode from Knoll betimes that day,  
And goodman Thorkel brought him on the way  
With twelve men more, and therewithal they ride  
Fast from the west, but where the pass grew wide  
And opened into Swinedale, Kiartan stayed  
His company, and unto Thorkel said,  
"Thanks have thou, goodman, for thy following ;  
Now get thee back, I fear not anything  
'Twixt this and Herdholt."

"Well," the goodman said,  
"Time enow is there yet to be waylaid  
Ere thou art safe at home ; let us ride on."

"Nay," Kiartan said, "the thing shall not be done,  
All men of heart will say that heart I lack,  
If I must have an army at my back  
Where'er I go, for fear of Oswif's sons.  
Fare thee well, goodman, get thee back at once !  
And therewithal take this to comfort thee,  
That Bodli yet is scarce mine enemy,  
And holds aback those brethren ; wot ye well,  
Too strange a story would it be to tell,  
If these should overcome my father's son,  
Besides, without thee I ride not alone."

So back the goodman turned, misdoubting though,  
In spite of all how yet the day would go,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And up the dale rode Kiartan : An the Black,  
The man who erst the stolen sword brought back,  
Was with him there, and one named Thorarin,  
As slowly now the midway dale they win.

Now, as I find it written in my tale,  
There went that morn a goodman of the dale,  
About those bents his mares and foals to see,  
His herdsman with him ; these saw presently  
Up from the east the men of Bathstead ride,  
And take their stand along a streamlet's side  
Deep sunken in a hollow, where the mouth  
Of the strait pass turns somewhat to the south,  
From out the dale ; now, since the men they knew,  
Much they misdoubted what these came to do ;  
But when they turned them from the sunken stream,  
And saw the sun on other weapons gleam,  
And three men armed come riding from the west ;  
And when they knew the tallest and the best  
For Kiartan Olafson, therewith no more  
They doubted aught.

Then said the herdsman : "Sore  
The troubles are that on the country-side  
Shall fall, if this same meeting shall betide ;  
He is a great chief ; let us warn him then !"

"Yea, yea !" his master said, "and all such men  
As fate leads unto death, that we may be  
Twixt the two millstones ground right merrily,  
And cursed as we cry out ! thou art a fool,  
Who needs must be the beaker and the stool  
For great men's use ; emptied of joys of life

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For other's joy, then kicked by in the strife  
When they are drunken ; come, beside the way,  
Let us lie close to see the merry play !  
For such a swordsman as is Kiartan, we  
Shall scarce behold on this side of the sea ;  
And heavy odds he hath against him too.  
These are great men—good, let them hack and hew  
Their noble bodies for our poor delight ! ”

So down the bent they slipped, and as they might  
Lurked by the road, and thus they tell their tale :

Ere Kiartan reached the strait place of the dale,  
High up upon the brook-bank Bodli lay,  
So that his helm was just seen from the way ;  
Then Ospak went to him, and clear they heard  
Across the road his rough and threatening word :  
“ What dost thou here ? thou hast bethought thee then  
To warn thy friend that here lurk all-armed men.  
Thou knowest Gudrun's mind—or knowst it not,  
But knowst that we within a trap have got  
Thee and the cursed wretch, the proud Mire-blade,  
The Thief, the King's-pimp, the white Herdholt maid.  
Come, sister's husband, get thee lower down ! ”

The foam flew from the lips of the fierce clown  
As thus he spake, but Bodli rose and said :  
“ Thinkst thou I armed because I was afraid  
Of thee and thine this morn ? If thou knewst well  
Of love or honour, somewhat might I tell  
Why I am here with thee—If will I have,



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Kiartan, who was my friend, this day to save,  
Bethink thee I might do it otherwise  
Than e'en by showing what in ambush lies !  
—How if I stood beside him ? ”

“Down with thee  
And hold thy peace ! or he will hear and see.”

For so it was that Kiartan drew so near  
That now the herd their clinking bits might hear,  
Borne down upon the light wind : on he came,  
Singing an old song made in Odin's fame,  
Merry and careless on that sunny morn ;  
When suddenly out rang the Bathstead horn,  
And sharply he drew rein, and looked around ;  
Then did the lurkers from the gully bound  
And made on toward them, and down leapt all three,  
And Kiartan glanced around, and speedily  
Led toward a rock that was beside the way,  
And there they shifted them to stand at bay.

Most noble then looked Kiartan, said the herd,  
Nor ever saw I any less afeard ;  
Yet, when his watchful eye on Bodli fell,  
A change came o'er him, that were hard to tell,  
But that he dropped his hands at first, as one  
Who thinks that all is over now and done ;  
Yet, says the neatherd, soon his brows did clear,  
And from his strong hand whistled forth his spear,  
And down fell Thorolf clattering on the road.  
He cried, “ Down goes the thief beneath his load,  
One man struck off the tale ! I have heard tell  
Of such as dealt with more and came off well.”

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Silence a space but for the mail rings ; then  
Over the dusty road on rushed those men ;  
And, says the herd, there saw I for a space  
Confused gleam of swords about that place,  
And from their clatter now and then did come  
Sharp cry, or groan, or panting shout, as home  
Went point or edge : but pale as death one stood,  
With sheathed sword, looking on the clashing wood,  
And that was Bodli Thorleikson. Then came  
A lull a little space in that wild game.  
The Bathstead men drew off, and still the three  
Stood there scarce hurt as far as I could see ;  
But of the Bathstead men I deem some bled,  
Though all stood firm ; then Ospak cried and said :

“ O Bodli, what thing wilt thou prophesy  
For us, since like a seer thou standest by  
And see'st thine house beat back ? well then for thee  
Will I be wise, foretelling what shall be—  
A cold bed, and a shamed board, shalt thou have,  
Yea, and ere many days a chased dog's grave,  
If thou bringst home to-day a bloodless sword ! ”

But yet for all that answered he no word,  
But stood as made of iron, though the breeze  
Blew his long black hair round his cheek-pieces  
And fanned his scarlet kirtle.

“ Time we lose,”

Another cried, “ if Bodli so shall choose,  
Let him deal with us when this man is slain.”  
Then stoutly to the game they gat again

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And played awhile, and now withal I saw  
That rather did the sons of Oswif draw  
Toward Thorarin and An, until the first,  
From midst the knot of those onsetters burst,  
And ran off west, followed by two stout men,  
Not Oswif's sons ; and An the Black fell then  
Wounded to death, I deemed, but over him  
Fell Gudlaug, Oswif's nephew, with a limb  
Shorn off by Kiartan's sword : then once again  
There came a short lull in the iron rain ;  
And then the four fell on him furiously  
Awhile, then gave aback, and I could see  
The noble Kiartan, with his mail-coat rent,  
His shield hung low adown, his sword-blade bent,  
Panting for breath, but still without a wound.

While as a man by some strong spell fast bound,  
Without a will for aught, did Bodli stand,  
Nor once cast eyes on the waylayers' band,  
Nor once glanced round at Kiartan, but stared still  
Upon the green side of the grassy hill  
Over against him, e'en as he did deem  
It yet might yawn as in a dreadful dream,  
And from its bowels give some marvel birth,  
That in a ghostly wise should change the earth,  
And make that day nought. But as there he stood  
Ospak raised up his hand, all red with blood,  
And smote him on the face, and cried :  
"Go home,  
Half-hearted traitor, e'en as thou hast come,  
And bear my blood to Gudrun !"

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Still no word  
Came from his pale lips, and the rover's sword  
Abode within the scabbard. Ospak said,  
"O lover, art thou grown too full of dread  
To look him in the face whom thou fearedst not  
To cozen of the fair thing he had got?  
O faint-heart thief of love, why drawest thou back,  
When all the love thou erst so sore didst lack  
With one stroke thou mayst win?"

He did not hear,  
Or seemed to hear not; but now loud and clear  
Kiartan cried out his name from that high place,  
And at the first sound Bodli turned his face  
This way and that, in puzzled hapless wise,  
Till 'twixt the spears his eyes met Kiartan's eyes;  
Then his mouth quivered, and he writhed aside,  
And with his mail-clad hands his face did hide,  
And trembled like one palsy-struck, while high  
Over the doubtful field did Kiartan cry:

"Yea, they are right! be not so hardly moved,  
O kinsman, foster-brother, friend beloved  
Of the old days, friend well forgiven now!  
Come nigher, come, that thou my face mayst know,  
Then draw thy sword and thrust from off the earth  
The fool that so hath spoilt thy days of mirth,  
Win long lone days of love by Gudrun's side!  
My life is spoilt, why longer do I bide  
To vex thee, friend?—strike then for happy life!  
I said thou mightst not gaze upon the strife  
Far off; bethink thee then, who sits at home

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And waits thee, Gudrun, mine own love, and come,  
Come, for the midday sun is over bright,  
And I am wearying for the restful night ! ”

And now had Bodli dropped his hands adown,  
And shown his face all drawn into a frown  
Of doubt and shame ; his hand was on his sword,  
Even ere Kiartan spake that latest word ;  
Still trembling, now he drew it from its sheath,  
And the bright sun ran down the fated death,  
And e'en the sons of Oswif shuddered now,  
As with wild eyes and heavy steps and slow  
He turned toward Kiartan ; beat the heart in me  
Till I might scarce breathe, for I looked to see  
A dreadful game ; the wind of that midday  
Beat 'gainst the hill-sides ; a hound far away  
Barked by some homestead's door ; the grey ewe's bleat  
Sounded near by ; but that dull sound of feet,  
And the thin tinkling of the mail-coat rings  
Drowned in my ears the sound of other things,  
As less and less the space betwixt them grew ;  
I shut my eyes as one the end who knew,  
But straight, perforce, I opened them again,  
Woe worth the while !

As one who looks in vain  
For help, looked Kiartan round ; then raised his shield,  
And poised his sword as though he ne'er would yield  
Even when the earth was sinking ; yet a while,  
And o'er his face there came a quivering smile,  
As into Bodli's dreadful face he gazed ;  
Then my heart sank within me, as all dazed,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

I saw the flash of swords that never met,  
And heard how Kiartan cried :

“ Ah, better yet  
For me to die than live on even so !  
Alas ! friend, do the deed that thou must do !  
Oh, lonely death !—farewell, farewell, farewell ! ”

And clattering on the road his weapons fell,  
And almost ere they touched the bloody dust,  
Into his shieldless side the sword was thrust,  
And I, who could not turn my eyes away,  
Beheld him fall, and shrieked as there I lay,  
And yet none noted me ; but Bodli flung  
Himself upon the earth, and o’er him hung,  
Then raised his head, and laid it on his knee,  
And cried :

“ Alas ! what have I done to thee ?  
Was it for this deed, then, that I was born ?  
Was this the end I looked for on this morn ?  
I said, To-day I die, to-day I die,  
And folk will say, an ill deed, certainly,  
He did, but living had small joy of it,  
And quickly from him did his weak life flit—  
Where was thy noble sword I looked to take  
Here in my breast, and die for Gudrun’s sake,  
And for thy sake—O friend, am I forgot ?  
Speak yet a word ! ”

But Kiartan answered not,  
And Bodli said, “ Wilt thou not then forgive ?  
Think of the days I yet may have to live  
Of hard life ! ”

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Therewith Kiartan oped his eyes,  
And strove to turn about as if to rise,  
And could not, but gazed hard on Bodli's face,  
And gasped out, as his eyes began to glaze :

“Farewell, thou joyous life beneath the sun,  
Thou foolish wasted gift—farewell, Gudrun !”  
And then on Bodli's breast back fell his head,  
He strove to take his hand, and he was dead.

Then was there silence a long while, well-nigh  
We heard each other breathe, till quietly  
At last the slayer from the slain arose,  
And took his sword, and sheathed it, and to those  
Four sons of Oswif, e'en as one he spake  
Who had good right the rule o'er them to take :

“Here have we laid to earth a mighty one,  
And therein no great deed, forsooth, have done,  
Since his great heart o'ercame him, not my sword ;  
And what hereafter may be our reward  
For this, I know not : he that lieth here  
By many a man in life was held right dear,  
As well as by the man who was his friend,  
And brought his life and love to bitter end ;  
And since I am the leader of this band  
Of man-slayers, do after my command.  
Go ye to Bathstead, name me everywhere  
The slayer of Kiartan Olafson, send here  
Folk who shall bear the body to our stead ;  
And then let each man of you hide his head,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For ye shall find it hard from this ill day  
To keep your lives : here meanwhile will I stay,  
Nor think myself yet utterly alone."

Then home turned Oswif's sons, and they being gone,  
We slunk away, and looking from the hill  
We saw how Bodli Thorleikson stood still  
In that same place, nor yet had faced the slain.  
And so we gat unto our place again.

So told the herd, time long ago, the tale  
Of that sad fight within the grey-sloped vale.

### *Kiartan brought dead to Bathstead*

**M**EN say that those who went the corpse to bring  
To Bathstead thence, found Bodli muttering  
Over the white face turned up to the sky,  
Nor did he heed them as they drew anigh,  
Therefore they stood by him, and heard him say :

"Perchance it is that thou art far away  
From us already ; caring nought at all  
For what in after days to us may fall—  
—O piteous, piteous !—yet perchance it is  
That thou, though entering on thy life of bliss,  
The meed of thy great heart, yet art anear,  
And somewhat of my feeble voice canst hear ;  
Then scarce for pardon will I pray thee, friend,  
Since thus our love is brought unto no end,



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

But rather now, indeed, begins anew ;  
Yet since a long time past nought good or true  
My lips might utter, let me speak to thee,  
If so it really is that thou art free,  
At peace and happy past the golden gate ;  
That time is dead for thee, and thou mayst wait  
A thousand years for her and deem it nought.  
O dead friend, in my heart there springs a thought  
That, since with thy last breath thou spok'st her name,  
And since thou knowest now how longing came  
Into my soul, thou wilt forgive me yet  
That time of times, when in my heart first met  
Anger against thee, with the sweet sweet love  
Wherewith my old dull life of habit strove  
So weakly and so vainly—didst thou quite  
Know all the value of that dear delight  
As I did ? Kiartan, she is changed to thee ;  
Yea, and since hope is dead changed too to me,  
What shall we do, if, each of each forgiven,  
We three shall meet at last in that fair heaven  
The new faith tells of ? Thee and God I pray  
Impute it not for sin to me to-day,  
If no thought I can shape thereof but this :  
O friend, O friend, when thee I meet in bliss,  
Wilt thou not give my love Gudrun to me,  
Since now indeed thine eyes made clear can see  
That I of all the world must love her most ? ”

Then his voice sank so that his words were lost  
A little while ; then once again he spake,  
As one who from a lovesome dream doth wake :

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“Alas ! I speak of heaven who am in hell !  
I speak of change of days, who know full well  
How hopeless now is change from misery :  
I speak of time destroyed, when unto me  
Shall the world’s minutes be as lapse of years ;  
I speak of love who know how my life bears  
The bitter hate which I must face to-day—  
I speak of thee, and know thee passed away,  
Ne’er to come back to help or pity me.”

Therewith he looked up, and those folk did see,  
And rose up to his feet, and with strange eyes  
That seemed to see nought, slunk in shamefast wise,  
Silent, behind them, as the corpse they laid  
Upon the bier ; then, all things being arrayed,  
Back unto Bathstead did they wend once more,  
As mournful as though dead with them they bore  
The heart of Iceland ; and yet folk must gaze  
With awe and pity upon Bodli’s face,  
And deem they never might such eyes forget.

But when they reached the stead, anigh sunset,  
There in the porch a tall black figure stood,  
Whose stern pale face, ’neath its o’erhanging hood,  
In the porch shadow was all cold and grey,  
Though on her feet the dying sunlight lay.  
They trembled then at what might come to pass,  
For that grey face the face of Gudrun was,  
And they had heard her raving through the day  
As through the hall they passed ; then made they stay  
A few yards from the threshold, and in dread  
Waited what next should follow ; but she said,  
In a low voice and hoarse :

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

“Nay, enter here,  
Without, this eve is too much change and stir,  
And rest is good,—is good, if one might win  
A moment's rest; and now none is within  
The hall but Oswif: not much will he speak,  
And as for me—behold, I am grown weak!  
I cannot vex him much.”

She stepped aside,  
And the dark shade her raiment black did hide  
As they passed through into the dusky hall,  
Afraid to see her face, and last of all  
Went Bodli, clashing through the porch, but he  
Stayed in the midst, and turned round silently,  
And sought her face and said:

“Thy will is done.  
Is it enough? Art thou enough alone  
As I am?”

Never any word she spake.  
No hate was in her face now: “For thy sake  
I did it, Gudrun. Speak one word to me  
Before my bitter shame and misery  
Crushes my heart to death.”

She reached a hand  
Out toward the place where trembling he did stand,  
But touched him not, and never did he know  
If she had mind some pity then to show  
Unto him, or if rather more apart  
She fain had thrust him from her raging heart,  
For now those men came tramping from the hall,  
And Bodli shrank aback unto the wall  
To let them pass, and when the last was gone,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

In the dim twilight there he stood alone,  
Nor durst he follow her, but listened there,  
Half-dead, and but his breathing might he hear,  
And the faint noises of the gathering night.  
He stood so long that the moon cast her light  
In through the porch, and still no sound he heard  
But the faint click of mail-rings as he stirred.  
“Ah, she is dead of grief, or else would she  
Have come to say some little word to me,  
Since I so love her, love her!”

With a wail  
He cried these words, and in the moonlight pale,  
Clashing he turned: but e'en therewith a shriek  
From out the dead hush of the hall did break,  
And then came footsteps hurrying to the porch,  
And the red flare of a new-litten torch,  
And smit by nameless horror and affright  
He fled away into the moonlit night.

### *What Folk did at Herdholt after the Slaying*

NOW in the hall next morn did Oswif bide  
The while his messengers went far and wide  
Asking for help; and all in hiding lay  
Whose hapless hands had brought about that day,  
Save Bodli; but for him, when back he came  
That morn, affrighted, Oswif called his name,  
Beholding him so worn and changed, and said:

“Stout art thou, kinsman, not to hide thine head!  
Yet think that Olaf is a mighty man,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And though thy coming life look ill and wan—  
Good reason why—Yet will I ask of thee  
The staff of mine old age at least to be,  
And save thy life therefor.”

Then Bodli smiled  
A ghastly smile: “Nay, I am not beguiled  
To hope for speedy death; is it not told  
How that Cain lived till he was very old?”

Therewith he sank adown into a seat  
And hid his face. But sound of hurrying feet  
Was in the porch withal; and presently  
Came one who said:

“Oswif, all hail to thee!  
From Holyfell I come with tidings true,  
That little will the wily Snorri do  
To help us herein; for he saith the deed  
Is most ill done, and that thy sons shall need  
More help than they shall get within the land;  
Yet saith withal, he will not hold his hand  
From buying peace, if that may serve thy turn.”

“Well, well,” said Oswif, “scarce now first I learn  
That Snorri bides his time, and will not run  
His neck into a noose for any one.  
Go, get thee food, good fellow. Whence com’st thou  
Who followest, thy face is long enow?”

“The bearer of a message back I am  
From Whiteriver, where Audun Festargram  
Has well-nigh done his lading, and, saith he,  
That so it is he feareth the deep sea

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But little, and the devil nought at all ;  
But he is liefer at hell's gate to call  
With better men than are thy sons, he saith."

"Good," Oswif said, "that little he fears death  
My sight clears, and I see his black bows strike  
The hidden skerry. But thou next ; belike  
Thou hast ill tidings too : what saith my friend,  
The son of Hauskuld ? what shall be the end ?"

"Oswif," the man said, "be not wroth with me  
If unto Herdholt nowise openly  
I went last night ; I fared with hidden head  
E'en as a man who drifts from stead to stead  
When things go ill : so shelter there I gat,  
And mid the house-carles long enow I sat  
To note men's bearing. Olaf—an old man  
He looks now truly—sat all worn and wan  
Within the high-seat, and I deemed of him  
That he had wept, from his red eyes and dim,  
That scarce looked dry as yet ; but down the board  
Sat Thorgerd, and I saw a naked sword  
Gleam from her mantle ; round her sat her sons,  
And unto Haldor did she whisper once  
And looked toward Olaf ; Haldor from its sheath  
Half drew his sword, and then below his breath  
Spake somewhat. Now looked Olaf round the hall,  
But when his eyes on Kiartan's place did fall  
His mouth twitched, though his eyes gazed steadily ;  
He set his hand unto a beaker nigh  
And drank and cried out :

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

‘Drink now all of you  
Unto the best man Iceland ever knew !  
Son, I am weary that thou hast not come  
With gleesome tales this eve unto my home ;  
Yet well thou farest surely amid those  
Who are the noblest there, and not so close  
They sit, but there is room for thee beside ;  
Sure, too, with them this eve is merry tide  
That thou art come amongst them—would that I,  
O son, O son, were of that company !’

“ With outstretched hand and fixed eyes did he stare,  
As though none other in the hall there were  
But him he named ; the while mid shout and clank  
All folk unto the man departed drank,  
And midst the noise, withal, I saw no few,  
Who from their sheaths the glittering weapons drew,  
And through the talk of Kiartan’s deeds I heard,  
Not lowly spoken, many a threatening word ;  
While with the tumult of the clattering place  
So gathered white-hot rage in Thorgerd’s face,  
That long it held her silent : then I saw  
A black form from the women’s chamber draw  
White-faced, white-handed ; ever did she gaze  
Upon the hall-door with an anxious face,  
And once or twice as the stout door-planks shook  
Beneath the wind’s stroke, a half-hopeful look  
Came o’er her face, that faded presently  
In anguish, as she looked some face to see  
Come from the night, and then remembered all ;  
And therewith did great ruth upon me fall,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For this was Refna ; and most quietly  
She passed to Olaf's side, and with a sigh  
Sat down beside him there ; now and again  
An eager look lit up her patient pain  
As from the home-men Kiartan's name came loud,  
And then once more her heavy head she bowed,  
And strove to weep and might not. In a while  
She raised her eyes, and met grey Thorgerd's smile  
Scornful and fierce, who therewithal rose up  
And laid her hand upon a silver cup,  
And drew from out her cloak a jewelled sword,  
And cast it ringing on the oaken board,  
And o'er the hall's noise high her clear voice shrilled :

“‘ If the old gods by Christ and mass are killed  
Or driven away, yet am I left behind,  
Daughter of Egil, and with such a mind  
As Egil had ; whereof if Asa Thor  
Has never lived, and there are men no more  
Within the land, yet by this king's gift here,  
And by this cup Thor owned once, do I swear  
That the false foster-brother shall be slain  
Before three summers have come round again,  
If but my hand must bring him to his end.’

“‘ Therewith a stern shout did her tall sons send  
Across the hall, and mighty din arose  
Among the home-men. Refna shrank all close  
To Olaf's side ; but he at first said nought,  
Until the cries and clash of weapons brought  
Across his dream some image of past days ;



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And, turning, upon Refna did he gaze,  
And on her soft hair laid his hand, and then  
Faced round upon the drink-flushed clamorous men,  
And in a mighty voice cried out and said :  
'Forbear, ye brawlers ! now is Kiartan dead,  
Nor shall I live long. Will it bring him back  
To let loose on the country war and wrack,  
And slay the man I love next after him ?  
Leave me in peace at least ! mine eyes wax dim,  
And little pleasure henceforth shall I have,  
Until my head hath rest within the grave.'

"Then did he rise and stretch across the board,  
And took into his hand the noble sword,  
And said, 'In good will wert thou given, O blade,  
But not to save my son's heart wert thou made.  
Help no man henceforth ! harm no man henceforth !  
Thou foolish glittering toy of little worth !'

"Therewith he brake the sword across his knee,  
And cast it down ; and then I minded me  
How the dead man there bore not that fair blade  
When unto grass of Swinedale he was laid.  
But Olaf looked so great a man, that none  
Durst say a word against him. 'Gone is gone,'  
He said, 'nor yet on Bodli shall ye fall.  
When all is ready Kiartan's voice shall call  
For him he loved ; but if it must be so,  
Then unto Oswif's base sons shall ye show  
That him they did to death left friends behind ;  
For this thing ever shall ye bear in mind,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

That through their vile plots did all come to pass,  
And Bodli but the sword they fought with was.'

"And therewithal he sat down wearily,  
And once again belike saw nought anigh.

"Well, Oswif, little more there happed that eve,  
And I at dawn to-day their stead did leave,  
To tell thee how things went."

Now Bodli heard  
The man speak, and some heart in him was stirred  
When of the woman's oath was told, but when  
The tale was ended, his head sank again  
With a low moan; but Oswif said:

"Yea, true  
Did my heart tell me, when I thought I knew  
The nobleness of Olaf Hauskuldson.  
What shall be done now?"

As he spake came one  
Panting and flushed into the hall, and cried:  
"Get to your arms in haste; Herdholt doth ride  
Unto our stead in goodly company!"  
Then was there tumult as was like to be,  
And round the silent face of the dead man,  
Hither and thither, half-armed tremblers ran  
With poor hearts; but old Oswif to the door  
Went forth unarmed, and Bodli scarce moved more  
Than his dead foster-brother. Soon withal  
Did quiet on the troubled homestead fall,  
For there was nought come but a peaceful train  
To bring back Kiartan to his home again;  
And there upon the green slope did they bide,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Whence Kiartan on that other morn had cried  
His scorn aloud ; wherefrom were six men sent,  
Who, entering now the thronged hall, slowly went,  
Looking around them, toward the bier ; but as  
They drew anear it, from the bower did pass  
A black-clad figure, and they stood aghast,  
For it was Gudrun, and wild eyes she cast  
On this and that man, as if questioning  
Mutely the meaning of some dreadful thing  
She knew was doing there : her black gown's hem  
She caught up wildly as she gazed at them,  
Then shuddering cast it down, and seemed to seek  
The face of Oswif ; then as if to shriek  
She raised her head, and clenched her hands, but nought  
Of sound from out her parched lips was there brought,  
Till at her breast she clutched, and rent adown  
With trembling hands the bosom of her gown,  
And cried out, panting as for lack of air :

“ Alas, what do ye ? have ye come to bear  
My love a second time from me, O men ?  
Do ye not know he is come back again  
After a long time ? Ah, but evil heart  
Must be in you such love as ours to part ! ”

Then, crying out, upon the corpse she fell,  
And men's hearts failed them for pure ruth, and well  
They deemed it, might she never rise again ;  
But strong are many hearts to bear all pain  
And live, and hers was even such an one.  
Softly they bore her back amidst her swoon ;

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And then, while even men must weep, once more  
Did Kiartan pass the threshold of the door,  
That once had been the gate of Paradise  
Unto his longing heart. But in nowise  
Did Bodli move amidst all this, until  
Slow wound the Herdholt men around the hill;  
Then stealthily his white face did he raise,  
And turned about unto the empty place  
Where erst the bier had stood; then he arose,  
And looked into the faces of all those  
Who stood around, as asking what betid,  
What dreadful thing the quivering silence hid;  
And then he staggered back unto the wall,  
And such a storm of grief on him did fall,  
With sobs, and tears, and inarticulate cries,  
That men for shame must turn away their eyes,  
Nor seem to see a great man fallen so low.

With such wild songs home to the stead came now  
The last load of that bitter harvesting,  
That from the seed of lust and lies did spring.

*Gudrun's deeming of the Men who loved her*

**T**HUS have I striven to show the troublous life  
Of these dead folk, e'en as if mid their strife  
I dwelt myself; but now is Kiartan slain;  
Bodli's blank yearning, Gudrun's wearying pain,  
Shall change but little now unto the end;  
And midst a many thoughts home must I wend,

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

And in the ancient days abide no more.  
Yet, when the shipman draweth nigh the shore,  
And slacks the sheet and lets adown the sail,  
Scarce suddenly therewith all way doth fail  
The sea-clasped keel. So with this history  
It fareth now; have patience then with me  
A moment yet, ere all the tale is told.

While Olaf Peacock lived, his sons did hold  
Their hands from Bodli; Oswif's sons must pay  
With gold and outlawry for that ill day,  
And nothing else there happened to them worse  
Than o'er the sea to bear all people's curse,  
Nor know men aught more of their history.  
Three winters afterward did Olaf die,  
Full both of years and honour; then was not  
Thorgerd's fierce oath amidst her sons forgot;  
The golden ring, whose end old Guest foresaw,  
Worn through the weary years with many a flaw,  
Now smitten, fell asunder: Bodli died  
Manlike amidst his foes, with none beside  
To sorrow o'er him, scarcely loth maybe  
The end of his warped life at last to see.

Turn back a while; of her I have to tell,  
Whose sorrow on my heart the more doth dwell,  
That nought she did to earn it, as I deem—  
—Unto the Ridge, where on the willowy stream  
Her father's stead looks down, did Refna go,  
That, if it might be, she some rest might know  
Within the fair vale where she wandered, when

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The bearded faces of the weaponed men  
Were wonders to her child's eyes, far away  
The wild thoughts of their hearts; her little day  
Of hope and joy gone by, there yet awhile  
She wandered once again; nor her faint smile  
Would she withhold, when pitying eyes did gaze  
On the deep sorrow of her lovely face;  
For she belike felt strong, and still might deem  
That life, all turned into a longing dream,  
Would long abide with her—happier she was,  
But little time over her head did pass,  
Before all smiles from off her face did fade,  
And in the grave her yearning heart was laid,  
No more now to be rent 'twixt hope and fear,  
No more to sicken with the dull despair.

Yet is she left to tell of, some might call,  
The very cause the very curse of all;  
And yet not I—for after Bodli's death  
Too dreadful grew the dale, my story saith,  
For Gudrun longer at her house to dwell,  
Wherefore with Snorri, lord of Holyfell,  
Did she change steads. There dwelt she a long space,  
And true it is, that in her noble face  
Men deemed but little signs of woe they saw;  
And still she lived on long, and in great awe  
And honour was she held, nor unfulfilled  
Was the last thing that Guest deemed fate had willed  
Should fall on her: when Bodli's sons were men  
And many things had happed, she wed again,  
And though her days of keen joys might be bare  
Yet little did they bring of added care

## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

As on and on they wore from that old time  
When she was set amidst mad love and crime.

Yet went this husband's end no otherwise  
Than Guest foresaw : at last with dreamy eyes  
And weary heart from his grave too she turned.  
Across the waste of life on one hand burned  
The unforgotten sore regretted days  
Long left behind ; and o'er the stony ways  
Her feet must pass yet, the grey cloud of death  
Rolled doubtful, drawing nigher. The tale saith  
That she lived long years afterwards, and strove,  
E'en as she might, to win a little love  
From God now, and with bitter yearning prayer  
Through these slow-footed lonely days to wear.  
And men say, as to all the ways of earth  
Her soul grew blind, and other hopes had birth  
Within her, that her bodily sight failed too,  
And now no more the dark from day she knew.

This one more picture gives the ancient book  
On which I pray you for a while to look,  
If for your tears ye may. For it doth tell  
That on a day she sat at Holyfell  
Within the bower, another Bodli there  
Beside her, son of him who wrought her care ;  
A travelled man and mighty, gay of weed,  
Doer belike of many a desperate deed  
Within the huge wall of the Grecian king.  
A summer eve it was, and everything  
Was calm and fair, the tinkling bells did sound  
From the fair chapel on the higher ground

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Of the holy hill, the murmur of the sea  
Came on the fitful south-west soothingly ;  
The house-carles sang as homeward now they went  
From out the home-field, and the hay's sweet scent  
Floated around : and when the sun had died  
An hour ago now, Bodli stirred and sighed ;  
Perchance too clearly felt he life slip by  
Amid those pensive things, and certainly  
He too was past his youth.

“Mother,” he said,  
“Awhile ago it came into my head  
To ask thee somewhat ; thou hast loved me well,  
And this perchance is no great thing to tell  
To one who loves thee.”

With her sightless eyes  
Turned on him did she smile in loving wise,  
But answered nought ; then he went on, and said :  
“Which of the men thou knewest—who are dead  
Long ago, mother,—didst thou love the best ?”

Then her thin hands each upon each she pressed,  
And her face quivered, as some memory  
Were hard upon her :

“Ah, son ! years go by.  
When we are young this year we call the worst  
That we can know ; this bitter day is cursed,  
No more such days our hearts can bear we say.  
But yet as time from us falls fast away  
There comes a day, son, when all this is fair  
And sweet, to what, still living, we must bear—  
*Bettered is bale by bale that follows it,*  
The saw saith.”



## THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

Silent both awhile did sit  
Until she spake again : "Easy to tell  
About them, son, my memory serves me well :  
A great chief Thorkel was, bounteous and wise,  
And ill hap seemed his death in all men's eyes.  
Bodli thy sire was mighty of his hands,  
Scarce better dwelt in all the northern lands ;  
Thou wouldst have loved him well. My husband Thord  
Was a great man ; wise at the council-board,  
Well learned in law—for Thorwald, he indeed,  
A rash weak heart, like to a stinging weed  
Must be pulled up—ah, that was long ago !"

Then Bodli smiled, "Thou wouldst not have me know  
Thy thought, O mother—these things know I well,  
Old folk about these men e'en such tales tell."

She said, "Alas, O son, thou askst of love !  
Long folly lasteth ; still that word doth move  
My old worn heart—hearken one little word,  
Then ask no more ; ill is it to be stirred  
To vain repining for the vanished days."

She turned, until her sightless eyes did gaze  
As though the wall, the hills, must melt away,  
And show her Herdholt in the twilight grey ;  
She cried, with tremulous voice, and eyes grown wet  
For the last time, whate'er should happen yet,  
With hands stretched out for all that she had lost :

"I did the worst to him I loved the most."

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

THEY too, those old men, well might sit and gaze  
Upon the images of bygone days,  
And wonder mid their soft self-pity, why  
Mid such wild struggles had their lives gone by,  
Since neither love nor joy, nor even pain,  
Should last for ever ; yet their strife so vain  
While still they strove, so sore regretted now,  
The heavy grief that once their heads did bow,  
Had wrought so much for them, that they might sit  
Amid some pleasure at the thought of it ;  
At least not quite consumed by sordid fear,  
That now at last the end was come anear ;  
At least not hardened quite so much, but they  
Might hear of love and longing worn away  
Twixt birth and death of others, wondering  
Belike, amid their pity what strange thing  
Made the mere truth of what poor souls did bear  
—In vain or not in vain—so sweet to hear,  
So healing to the tangled woes of earth,  
At least for a short while.

But little mirth  
The grey eve and the strong unfailing wind  
Might ask of them that tide ; and yet behind  
That mask of pensive eyes, so unbeguiled  
By ancient folly any more, what wild  
Strange flickering hopes ineffable might lie,  
As swift that latter end of eve slipped by !

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